

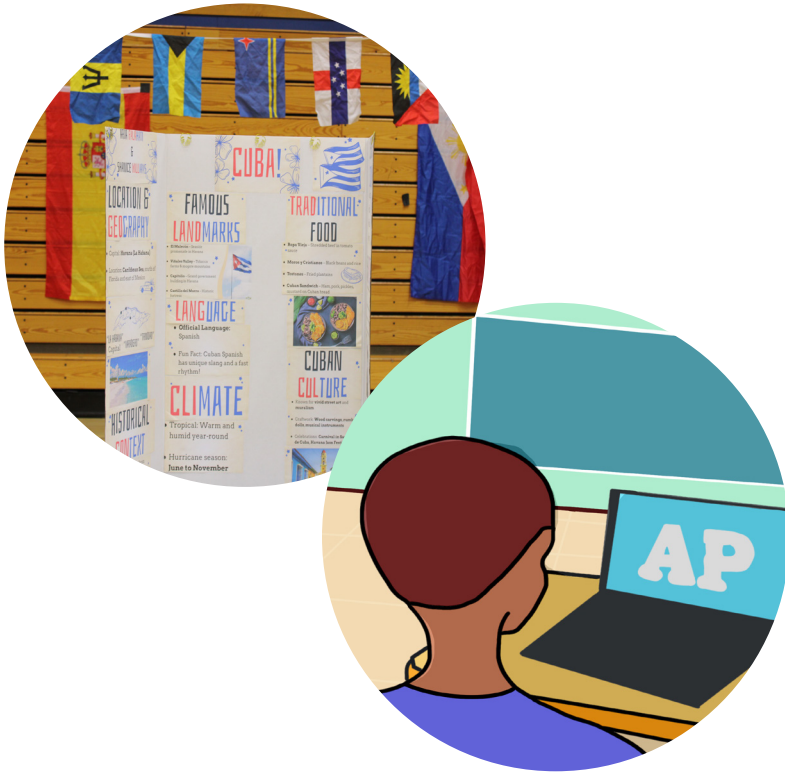
# BLUEPRINT

Issue 8 | Volume 85 | May 2025

Commemorating Amin Noroozi



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## *Behind the Scenes of Cover's Art*

Dear *Blueprint* Reader,

As a graphics team, it is our goal to capture the ideas of *Blueprint* articles effectively by portraying the pieces visually. For this issue, the cover is dedicated to the life of Amin Noroozi, a son, brother, friend, athlete, and strong presence in our community. Initially, I made this graphic as a way to cope and focus on something productive amidst the chaos of my grief. I wanted to create something for me, but also for him and the people he cared for. I chose to recreate this image of him because I felt that it portrayed him in one of the many ways he will be remembered: a strong athlete who played and lived with his whole heart. When I learned that the cover story would be in memoriam of him, I decided this graphic that I had made for me should be shared with all of the people who knew and loved him. His memory is one that will live on through all those he touched in his time here.

To see more contributed photos of Amin, turn to page 12

Audrey Martin | Senior Photographer

*Blueprint* strives to uplift voices in our community with truth and transparency

## Letter from the Editors

Dear *Blueprint* Reader,

This publication marks *Blueprint*'s first issue with our new editorial staff and Print Editors-in-Chief. As the new Print Editors-in-Chief, we are incredibly excited for this new chapter of *Blueprint*. We will lead *Blueprint* in the 2025-2026 school year and introduce new staff writers in the fall. We look forward to continuing to uphold our mission of reporting in a way that uplifts voices in our school and community through truth and transparency.

In our cover story, *Blueprint* honors our friend and classmate, Amin Noroozi. As members of this community who felt the gravity of this loss, we felt moved by the way the community gathered together and wanted to use our platform, this paper, to reflect on the community response. We will miss Amin's light every day, and it felt fitting to dedicate this issue of *Blueprint* to him.

To submit a response to any story within our paper, scan the QR code to submit a letter to the editor through *Blueprint* Online. Please refer to the bottom of the Table of Contents for *Blueprint*'s mission statement. We hope you enjoy this issue of *Blueprint* and look forward to sharing more stories in the future.

Molly Connelly & Neve Murphy | Print Editors-in-Chief



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## NEWS



### Celebrating Mother Earth

*Lafayette hosts its 18th annual Earth Day event*

Arman Craig, Natalie Pecci, and Donovan McGrath | Business Manager, Online Editor, and Staff Writer

Photo by Natalie Pecci

The town plaza bustled with people of all ages as they stopped at the endless tables lining the square, pet bunnies, made tote bags, and more.

On April 27, Lafayette held its eighteenth annual Earth Day celebration at the Lafayette Plaza. While at the event, attendees explored booths that showcased various projects, nonprofits, and businesses, all committed to caring for the environment.

Sustainable Lafayette, an organization committed to inspiring the community to fight for environmental health and justice, was the host of the annual Earth Day celebration.

"Earth Day is a reminder that we still need to protect our natural resources. Especially in the current political climate, local action is essential. We need to take responsibility for our local environment and act accordingly," Sustainable Lafayette Board Member Brad Crane said.

This year's Earth Day event promoted various youth initiatives and programs such as 4-H, Girl Scout projects, Scouting America Troop 200 drives, and other school initiatives. Among them was the Acalanes Environmental Board.

"We're going to be hosting a table ... about what the Acalanes Environmental Board does. So, promoting what we do on campus and advocating for students

to represent the same qualities on their campus," Acalanes Environmental Board Head and senior Hayley Takeshima said.

The Environmental Board thinks that participating in events showcases the ability and passion of the youth.

"It's to show that high school students also have the drive to help the environment as well. It's not just adults who can be participants in it. It's a student representative of what we can do," Takeshima said.

In addition to the Environmental Board, several other Acalanes students attended the event.

"I created a 21 Day for the Environment Challenge and I passed it out to a bunch of students at the local elementary school and a lot of them have come here and turned in their completed challenge," junior Lauren Anderson said.

Scouting America troops also had tables featuring various events, like their sneaker drive.

"I volunteered at the shoe drive. We collect shoes for people in need and then recycle everything that's not used," Scouting America Troop 200 member and frosh Brandon Fu said.

In addition to the participation of Acalanes students, organizations throughout California showed up to support the cause. A local government

agency, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD), attended and advocated for their cause.

"We protect air quality here. We regulate stationary sources of air pollution. The state regulates cars and trucks, ships, and anything that moves because those things can move between jurisdictions. We have local authority, which means things that don't move. We issue air quality permits to factories, refineries, gas stations, coffee roasters, and anything like that. So that they can't pollute too much harmful emissions into our air," a public information officer at BAAQMD Erin Demeritt said.

Many attendees liked the connection aspect of bringing the community together to discover and celebrate.

"I like the fact that people come out in the community to explore and learn together. I guess that's my favorite thing, not one particular booth or anything but just the whole thing. The idea that it's a time when people can come together, share information, learn, and think about their daily lives and what they are doing is either helping or hurting," attendee Jamie Harris said.

Others see the festival as a straightforward reminder to the community of what issues are prevalent today, and the small ways in which they can make a difference.

"I think people have to be reminded over and over again of the importance of the environment and the things that we can do. The small things we can do like recycling ... and planting plants and [other] things keep the environment strong and hopefully restore it," attendee Al Rothman said.

Hosting the event in the town square placed emphasis on the community aspect of Earth Day celebrations.

"I happened to see it because I was parked across the street, so I checked it out online and I thought this would be a fun event to come to," attendee Pat Engle said.

Overall, the festival aimed to raise awareness for environmental issues, sustainable practices, and promote youth involvement.

"The young people in Lafayette are amazing. They're motivated, dedicated, and persistent. They understand what's at stake and are willing to take action. We want to celebrate those kids every chance we get. We hope our local youth become lifelong advocates for the environment," Crane said.



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## "No Hay Más Que Hablar"

*AUHSD awards Monika Voellm Educator of the Year*

Maya Agarwal, Olivia Foster, Jenna Kessler, and Cameron Powell | Staff Writers

Photos by Audrey Martin



// A ver...,” a transitional phrase that many may recognize from Spanish class, as their teacher decides where to begin the lesson. Similarly, many may wonder where to begin when describing the impact of Monika Voellm, this year’s Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Educator of the Year.

Voellm, or Señora Voellm, as many of her Spanish students call her, is the 2024-2025 AUHSD Educator of the Year. The AUHSD Governing Board recognized Voellm, along with this year’s other site winners, during their May 7 meeting.

To be eligible for this year’s Educator of the Year nomination, the selected staff member must be a full-time certified educator, spend the majority of their time directly instructing students, have been in the AUHSD for at least five continuous years, and have been a returning teacher

in the 2024-2025 school year. Nominee criteria also involves demonstrating a strong commitment to students and educators, instructional leadership, influence beyond the classroom, effective communication, and an ambition to encourage student learning.

Choosing the AUHSD Educator of the Year is a two-part process that includes finalist selections at the site and district levels. Any staff member can nominate a teacher to the school-specific committee. Once each committee selects a site winner, the nominees go to the AUHSD office where administrators meet to hear principals present their candidate and choose a district winner through a ranked-choice voting process.

“Principal Shawn ... advocated for Ms. Voellm to be the winner ... The principals go into how many years [the educa-

tor has] taught, what they have taught, what their impact on students [has been], what’s special about this person, [and] why they’re deserving of the nomination,” AUHSD Deputy Superintendent Amy McNamara said. “We have a ballot with ten people ... From that ten we picked the top two winners ... a teacher of the year and then we picked a classified employee of the year. I would say a clear winner was Ms. Voellm.”

When considering Voellm for the AUHSD Educator of the Year award, her interdisciplinary leadership resonated with many of the district committee members.

“She’s not a person that goes out of her way to shine. She just shines because of the good work that she does and the impact she has on students ... I feel like Ms. Voellm is that person who’s always willing to help and say yes to things and step into leadership without expecting, wanting, or needing any accolades for it. She does it because she truly loves to do it and because she loves the impact on students, and if she can serve the district in any way and help students, that’s why she does it,” McNamara said.

On campus, Voellm wears many hats. In addition to teaching Spanish 4 Honors and Human and Social Development (HSD), she also serves as the Acalanes High School World Language Department Chair and District HSD Curricular Lead for the 2024-2025 academic year.

“As [the Acalanes High School] World Language Department] Chair I do a lot of organizing and advocating for our programs, our teachers, and our students. As the curricular lead for HSD I do that same organizing and advocating ... I also go to trainings and try [to] stay up-to-date with new developments and education law in our subject areas, particularly about drugs and alcohol and also sexual health, so that I can help keep our curriculum as current as possible,” Voellm said.

Voellm has taught for 26 years, and this year marks her twenty-first at Acalanes. When Voellm began teaching at Acalanes, she inherited project and lesson ideas from some of her Spanish language educator colleagues Elizabeth Gough, Elizabeth Holland, Heidi Skvarna, and Clifford Shaw. Today, current members of the team, as well as teachers from other departments, continue to share ideas.

“I work with such intelligent, dedicated,

and generous people that while it feels good to be acknowledged for what I do, ... being an educator to me feels much more like a team effort. So many of the elements of my classes that I am most excited about came from collaborating with my World Language and HSD teams," Voellm said. "So I feel honored to be honored and am fully aware that my successes are not wholly my own."

In her Spanish classes, Voellm works to incorporate games and other activities into the curriculum to reinforce students' comprehension of the topics.

"Señora always was able to come up with the most fun projects that would allow us to deepen our understanding of the grammar or the vocab we were learning, but also just have a ton of fun and I look[ed] forward to every class," senior Nathan Joseph said.

Outside of class, Voellm encourages students to expand their education beyond the school setting, advising them on trips to Spanish-speaking countries and more.

"She guides students on their summer travels and offers them advice on what to do. She also encourages them to continue their studies in the languages even though it may be challenging," Spanish 3 and English Language Development teacher Elizabeth Holland said.

Throughout the Spanish 4 Honors class, Voellm immerses students in the culture as well as the language. One immersive activity includes teaching her students traditional Latin styles of dance, including salsa, bachata, and merengue.

"Señora Voellm has grown my Spanish knowledge because she truly immerses us in Spanish culture. We get to explore different Latin American countries and their traditions and do activities that extend our knowledge," junior Piper Coy said.

Voellm also incorporates Latin and Spanish music into her lessons to support the course material. Some of these songs include Morat's "No Hay Más Que Hablar," Bomba Estero's "Soy Yo," and Gente de Zona's "La Gozadera."

"I loved all the songs that she picked last year. I still listen to a ton of the songs that we learned ... She picked a diverse set of songs from different styles because there's such a diverse array of styles in Latin America and the Spanish-speaking world, but then also songs that were culturally significant, like 'Latinoamérica,' the song about the Latin American experience and going back to colonization ... We were able to learn about the traditional rhythms but also learn about the culture" Joseph said.



Beyond Voellm's impact on students' experience in Spanish class, she applies a similar enthusiasm to her HSD classes, incorporating various activities and games to allow students to understand difficult topics.

"If we're dealing with a harsh topic, first of all, she'll address it and that it's going to be a little uncomfortable, and she also helps us understand it in a way that is more like ... a game to understand it more and to make it less intense," sophomore Eloise Greeson said.

Staff members also notice the initiative that Voellm takes to research new course material as it comes up and communicate new information to fellow HSD teachers.

"No matter what the unit is, she wants to know what the newest thing is, what's happening with the students, and then what the research is and then she puts that all together for us. The stuff she puts together I use all the time. She's tireless," HSD teacher Brian Smith said.

Staff and students alike recognize Voellm's dedication to her students and their wellbeing.

"She's unlike a lot of teachers in that she puts wellness and student care ahead of

what she is teaching even though what she is teaching is important and it's important to her, Spanish or HSD. She really cares about students and the impact that school is having on them and how they're doing outside of school as well," Smith said.

In addition to those in her class, fellow staff members have observed students turning to Voellm as a trusted figure on campus throughout her time as a teacher.

"She's a safe person to go to ... She shows [students] that she is somebody safe to talk to about [hard topics], and I know that there [are] just countless students over the 12 [or] 13 years we've had this class who have been able to go to her for support and guidance, and that's huge," HSD teacher Jada Paniagua said.

Ultimately, the Acalanes community values Voellm for her personality and the numerous efforts she makes to have a positive impact on those around her.

"She's not just an educator. She's a friend. She's a beloved person. She's someone that students can trust, which I think is hard to find. And she does carve out time for students to speak with them one on one and independently. It's hard on our campus to find that time and space to do so ... [She helps] make not only our school a better place but the world a better place," Holland said.



## Awards Honor Spirited Students

*Acalanes celebrates students who embody engagement, inclusion, spirit, and care through the Blue Heart and Silver A Awards\*.*

Maya Agarwal, Olivia Foster, Jenna Kessler, and Cameron Powell | Staff Writers  
Courtesy photo by Katherine Walton



With the school year wrapping up and students preparing for finals, teachers, administrators, and peers want to ensure that students get recognition for their hard work both in and outside of the classroom.

The Silver A Award and the Blue Heart Award are both newer creations by the school, introduced in 2022, aiming to build student recognition. Many agree that the awards are crucial in recognizing students who may not always be in the spotlight, but consistently contribute to the school's positive atmosphere.

"We wanted to acknowledge more students as the bottom line," Principal Eric Shawn said. "For a long time on this campus, we've had senior awards ... and we just saw this as a way to acknowledge more students who make this place special."

The Blue Heart Award is driven by student nominations and celebrates peers who actively embody the Acalanes Community Always (ACA) values: connectivity between Acalanes students, teachers,

staff members, alumni and the greater Lafayette community, as well as spirit and unity.

"[For the Blue Heart Award], peers nominate each other, then a group of students and our leadership teacher coordinate a group of staff and students to talk about the nominees and select 40 to 50 students to honor," Shawn said.

Faculty and students select the Blue Heart winners from the nominees by determining which students have shown a clear positive effect on the community throughout the school. One way that students received the award was through engagement, active participation, and aiding peers in class.

"I help my classmates in class with their work, and I'm actively participating in class, answering questions from my teacher," Blue Heart winner Billy O'Brien said.

Beyond academic participation, the Award seeks to honor those who bring positivity and kindness to school.

"The Blue Heart Award is for looking

at student contributions in and out of the classroom that aren't necessarily academic. It's for students who make our campus vibrant and inclusive and go out of their way to include people, but also lead in different ways," Walton said.

In order to formally acknowledge students and their contributions, the Blue Heart Award celebration took place during lunch on April 30, with an emphasis on recognition and gratitude.

"[April 30 was] the award lunch for all the award recipients, and [we gave] them their certificate and their stickers ... [We gave] a short speech about what it means to be a Blue Heart Award recipient and ... we [had] catered lunch," Blue Heart Award Committee member and junior Sveva Mauch said.

Alongside the acknowledgement, some recipients said the experience also allowed connections with students they may not talk to on a regular basis.

"Acalanes celebrated the winners with lunch, and I thought it was enjoyable to hang out with super nice people that I'm not very close to. It helped me get to know them better," Blue Heart winner Santana Tamayo said.

The Silver A Award, which replaced the old Department Underclassmen Awards, allows each teacher to honor two students of their choice who bring energy and passion into their classrooms. To honor these recipients of the Silver A Award, Acalanes hosted a celebratory breakfast on May 20, during which students and teachers alike gathered to share their appreciation for one another.

"It's an awards breakfast so we have lots of different food then people get their awards and we hang out. There's an acknowledgment and teachers come and congratulate their students on being phenomenal students on our campus," Shawn said.

The Silver A and Blue Heart awards can be crucial in recognizing students who may not have been acknowledged by staff or other students in the past.

"It's been really rewarding to see students receive these acknowledgments, especially students who haven't gotten awards in any other capacity in the past. I've had students who have come to that Silver A breakfast and say, I've never gotten an award for anything in school before, and I had no idea my teacher felt that way about me. It changes the way that they feel connected to school and

connected to their teachers and a sense of pride in the community,” Shawn said.

As the school year comes to an end, these awards can serve as messages of gratitude and acknowledgement for months of contributions.

“I don’t think we do enough formal student recognition. I think students work extremely hard and deserve a more formal way of knowing that their hard work is being seen and that their spirit and who they are is being seen by adults. So these awards are a way to show them that we see them and that we appreciate all that they’ve done,” Walton said.

As a whole, most students feel that the awards benefit the Acalanes environment while promoting student connection, kindness, and gratitude.

“I am thankful to go to school in a positive and inclusive environment, and acknowledging students for their contributions encourages people to pay forward an act of kindness. To me, the Blue Heart Award is simply a tangible example of my kindness and that of other students at Acalanes,” Blue Heart winner Daphne Dale said.



*Blueprint Graphic/Cade McAlister*



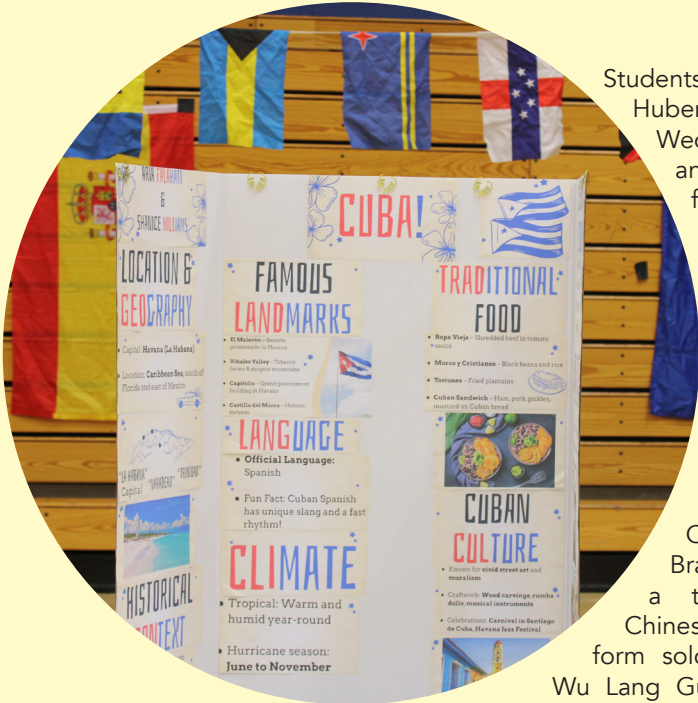


# Culture in Full Color

*Students embrace diverse traditions at the annual Cultural Fair*

Will Miller and Jack Gebhardt | Podcast Manager and Staff Writer

Photos by Will Miller



Students gathered in the Chris Huber Memorial Gym on Wednesday, April 23 for the annual Cultural Fair, which featured new additions and artistic expressions celebrating global heritage this year.

The fair began with a presentation from Mandarin students. They performed a customary Chinese ritual

and senior Camille Bradley gave a traditional Chinese staff form solo called

Wu Lang Gun. Following this, competitive ballroom dancers sophomore Alexis Kolovyansky and junior Veronica Flint performed the cha-cha, commemorating traditional Latin-inspired dances.

"The cha-cha-cha originated from Cuba and ballroom dancing was initially a style of dance with balls,

tango, and very classical pieces. I think it was the Royal Dance Council that found out about Cuban cha-cha-cha and they integrated it into ballroom society. Then they started taking other Latin American dances like the Samba and the Rumba and they brought it to Europe," sophomore Alexis Kolovyansky said.

After the performances, students explored an array of cultural booths, each offering a look into traditions, foods, and customs of countries from around the

globe. Some students in Elizabeth Holland's Spanish 3 class showcased Spanish-speaking countries for their Spring Cultural Project assignment, while other students represented their heritage.

"I created the booth to show people how we usually see everyday life in Brazil. I would say I think Brazil is a pretty nice country and pretty as a whole. We put some Carnival pictures [on our board] and also [masks]. It's



one of the most festive things that happen in Brazil and it's nice," senior Dominicky Santiago said.

The fair aimed to bring students together, teach them about various countries, and encourage them to embrace different cultures. Some staff believe the Cultural Fair represents the United States' salad bowl metaphor reflecting the coexistence of diverse cultures.

"The cultural fair has been going on one way or another for over 20 years ... everybody has an aspect of their culture that they moved here with or that they were raised with and it's important that we honor each other and we have a chance to share our culture," Spanish 2 teacher Heidi Skvarna said.

From the cha-cha-cha in Cuba to Chinese martial arts, the booths of different countries around the world and their cultures came together for a day of diversity and tradition.



# News Briefs

## Prom

Mila Ellis | Print News Editor

Casino games, dancing, aquariums, food, and more, on April 19

“A Night at the Museum” was the theme of this year’s prom.

The event was held at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco. Open to all juniors and seniors, the dance featured heavy appetizers, photo booths, and time in the museum’s extensive exhibits and attractions.

During the weeks leading up to prom, Leadership dedicated time and resources to promote and improve the event, aiming to make it an unforgettable night. Prom bus assignments took place on March 26, March 27, and the week of April 7-11, where attendees were able to sign up for the bus of their choice.

Leadership also assembled an Acalanes Prom Instagram account. Through social media posts and videos, students were encouraged to send in their “promposals”. These special and elaborate requests to be someone’s date to prom were another fun tradition to encourage excitement and connections before the event.

On the day of, students gathered at 5:00 p.m. together to board their buses to the event. With over 640 attendees, many agree the night fostered special connections and long-lasting memories.

## Earth Week

Tselmeg Orgilmunkh | Print Arts Editor

From recycling to climate conversations, Acalanes celebrated Earth Week from April 21-25. Leadership organized a series of events to bring awareness of environmental issues and promote action.

The week’s activities kicked off with a screening of the documentary *The Science of Our Planet*, followed by a group discussion to inspire attendees to improve their current environmental habits.

On Tuesday, students were invited to craft flowers out of recycled paper while learning about the significance of recycling paper and its beneficial impact on the environment.

Wednesday featured a nature walk at Briones during academy, chaperoned by Advanced Placement Environmental Science teacher Jada Paniagua.

Later that day at lunch, a guest speaker from RecycleSmart held a conversation on the documentary *Story of the Cup*. On Thursday, there was an information booth in the frosh quad run by Leadership’s Environmental Board. Students had the opportunity to win a prize if they correctly answered a question about sustainability, motivating knowledge of the environment.

Overall, the week left many students with new knowledge of the environment and eco-conscious experiences.

# DEIB Debrief

Sameed Marco | DEIB Director

*Hi, I am Sameed Marco, Blueprint's new Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Director. DEIB Debrief is a column that I will be taking over in hopes of spreading awareness about issues and events related to DEIB, and how they relate to Acalanes.*

## Pride Month

Each June, people across the country celebrate Pride Month to honor the LGBTQIA+ community. The celebration started as an annual reminder of the June 1969 Stonewall Uprisings, organized by activist groups to demand equal rights and recognition. Initially held in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, the tradition quickly spread to the rest of the U.S.

President Bill Clinton first recognized Pride Month in 1999, but only included people who were gay or lesbian. In 2011, President Barack Obama expanded the recognition to the LGBT community. While President Donald Trump has not made an official proclamation to recognize Pride Month this year, many continue to celebrate with or without federal recognition.

The Acalanes Union High School District also recognizes June as LGBTQIA+ Pride Month. Since Acalanes does not have school in June, the Queer Student Alliance (QSA) hosted meetings to celebrate LGBTQIA+ Pride in May. Students can also participate in the celebration in June.

"We will have a presentation where we talk about the history behind Pride Month. We'll have face paint, stickers, and food for people to come and enjoy. They can learn about why we are doing this and how it's important," QSA secretary Max Martinez said.

## Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month falls during May and celebrates the contributions and culture of AAPI people in the United States. During May of 1843, the first Japanese immigrant, Nakahama Manjirō, came to the U.S. In May of 1869, Chinese immigrants placed the final spike on the Transcontinental Railroad. Both events highlight significant contributions of AAPI in American history.

President Jimmy Carter initially recognized AAPI week as the week of May 4 to May 11 in 1979, which President George H. W. Bush later extended to a month. Despite having recognized AAPI Heritage Month each year of his first term, on Jan. 20, 2025 President Trump issued Executive Order 14148, which eliminated U.S. federal recognition of the month.

The Acalanes Union High School District recognizes May as Asian American, Pacific Islander and Desi Heritage Month. The Asian Student Union (ASU) is hosting meetings for the month to celebrate achievements and culture. These meetings include cultural foods and presentations on AAPI history and achievements.

"AAPI month is important because it recognizes Asian American and Pacific Islanders as an integral part in shaping America," ASU president Sabrina Koo said.



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# Commerating Amin Noroozi



*The Acalanes community gathers in honor of Amin Noroozi*

By the *Blueprint* Editorial Team

**Contributed** photos by Olivia DeBoy and **Audrey Martin**

The Acalanes community came together in the face of loss following the passing of Acalanes junior Amin Noroozi. On Thursday, April 17, 2025, Acalanes High School was notified of Amin's passing. In the days and weeks that followed, the community gathered at events honoring Amin to show support for the Noroozi family and friends.

Amin was an integral member of the Acalanes community. Those he interacted with speak of his kindness, heart-warming smile, and selflessness. Friends, family, teachers, and community members alike describe the positivity he brought to those around him.

"He was always that guy that had a smile on his face, always positive, always bringing people up, being known as that guy that will always find a way to make you laugh and make the bad times feel good and the good times feel better," friend of Amin's and junior River Lockwood said.

Amin was involved in three varsity sports at Acalanes: football, wrestling, and track and field. Amin was an offensive lineman for the football team, and he played a key role in the team's success. He was also a successful wrestler for two years, and this year, placed 4th in the Diablo Athletic League, as well as being a North Coast Section qualifier. At track and field, he threw shot put and discus.

"[Amin] had a really great impact on my life because I did a lot of things with him. Ever since a young age, we have always been competing against each other. He pushed me to be a better competitor in the things I do now... I want to act like Amin because everyone loved him and he was just such a great kid," friend of Amin's and junior Illias Kaplanes-Jones said.

On April 13, Amin was injured while enjoying a day at the beach with friends, and was transported to John Muir Health Medical Center in Walnut Creek. Amin's friends and peers came together to support the Noroozi family while he was in the hospital. After his injury, Amin's friends organized bake sales to fundraise, and Acalanes sports held various events in support of Amin and his family.

"When we were at the emergency room on Sunday, we saw the real weight of the entire situation, and we started brainstorming ways we could help out the Noroozi family. We hoped to inform our community about the situation

at hand and spread awareness. Additionally, we wanted to create a fundraising event that could get our entire grade involved, and the amount of support that the class of 2026 showed was genuinely heartwarming," fundraising organizer and junior Kyle Woodson said.

On April 16, the Acalanes baseball team rallied around the Noroozi family, who are a familiar presence at games through Ofie's Kitchen, Amin's parents' food truck. As it was Amin's mother Ofelia's birthday, the baseball team and Acalanes community that came to the game gathered to lift up her spirits.

Before the game, a large crowd gathered to watch Ofelia throw the ceremonial first pitch, erupting in cheers afterward. Acalanes baseball also held a food and bake sale to help fundraise. A close friend and supporter of the Noroozis, Jane Smith, launched the GoFundMe campaign, which has raised over \$190,000 to date.

While Amin was in the hospital, Acalanes students continued to come together and organize fundraising events both at Acalanes and in the community.

"We just made a group chat with our entire grade and shared access to a Google Sheets document that anyone could sign up on, and from that point on many slots filled up with people eager to contribute," Woodson said.

Acalanes students, especially juniors, joined to support Amin and his family, showing solidarity across campus.

"I think that the fact that our grade came together so quickly and so well reflects the kind of community that we have. Especially today, it's so rare to see an entire high school class come together and bond over a situation so





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serious, it's truly amazing to see how genuine all of our classmates are," Woodson said.

The Acalanes community was notified of the tragic passing of Amin on the afternoon of April 17, 2025. In the statement by Principal Eric Shawn, Acalanes announced that they would be holding space from the afternoon into the evening for the community to gather together.

"We needed to quickly pivot to get folks to come where we knew we could keep them safe and hold space for them to **grieve...** I think that that same approach was what guided us through the next day and the day after that and into prom," Shawn said.

Hundreds of people arrived at Acalanes, gathering in the front quad throughout the afternoon and evening to provide support for one another.

"The overall sense I got [from the gathering] was that people felt heard and understood, and that there was a place for them to be held and understood and to feel in the process," Shawn said.



**The following** day, hundreds of Acalanes students united by wearing blue to school in honor of Amin. Faith

Club held an event in the big gym on Friday, April 18, where students and local pastors spoke about grief and faith.

"What Faith Club **did...in** terms of putting that [event] together on **Wednesday...** with his friends speaking about him, and then again on **Friday...** it was two of their most highly attended meetings they'd ever had," Acalanes counselor and parent \*Susan Martin said.

There was a candlelight vigil held for Amin on the evening of Friday, April 18, where the Acalanes community gathered in grief. Family, friends, and loved ones spoke about Amin's impact on each of their lives and on the entire community.

"There were maybe 1,000 people there, and the students were all seated kind of in the middle with the rest of the community in a semicircle around them. It was on the football field," Amin's Advanced Placement Environmental Science teacher Jada Paniagua said.

Among the masses were people from across the entire Acalanes community and beyond that came to show their support and grieve with one another.

"I saw so many people



there, which was really amazing to see," friend of Amin's, coordinator, and junior Stella Pacheco said.

At the vigil, family members, coaches, friends, and loved ones spoke in front of the silent crowd about how Amin impacted them.

"I just wanted to talk about how he has played a role in my life and what I would have said to him if I could talk to him one more time, remembering all the good times we've had over the years and being grateful for the times that we had together. I was just happy that I got to experience those things with him before he passed away," Lockwood said.

Following the program, hundreds of community members stayed on the field, silently gathering over candles displayed in a circle at the center of the field. People held and comforted one another as they stood around the candles.

"I mean, there's been so much support, but it's also overwhelming at the same time, ... but we're very lucky to have [support]...The vigil was beautiful," Martin said.

The following day, April 19, Acalanes administration, following discussions with community members and those close to Amin, decided to proceed with Acalanes prom in an effort to allow students to connect and support one another. The statement Acalanes



from other schools that were there to support and so many age ranges. Grandparents and small children were



released that confirmed prom would go on announced their decision to increase parent and staff chaperones present to further support students.

"We came to the conclusion that [prom] needed to go forward and that that was going to be what was best for the **students...It's** what Amin would have wanted, is what students had said," Shawn said.

Acalanes students wore the blue ribbons that they received at the vigil the night before, pinned to their dresses and suits in honor of Amin as they gathered at prom.

Acalanes held prom at the California Academy of Sciences. Students danced, spent time with one another, and explored the aquarium. Leadership organized a collection of Amin's favorite songs to play in the last 20 minutes, for students to gather on the dance floor in honor of Amin.

"At the end of the night, the DJ played a playlist of songs that were songs that Amin liked, and the whole prom came together, and they just held each other in a circle and listened to those songs. I think they got to just lean on each other and feel their feelings deeply...that was a way, I think, of honoring their lost classmate," Shawn said.

At 9:40 p.m., all of the students at prom, juniors and seniors alike, gath-

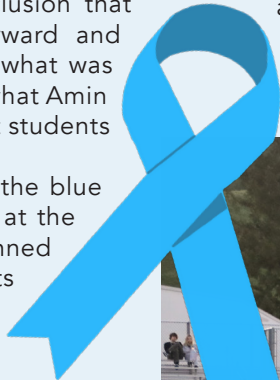
ered together on the dance floor as they stood in silence listening to Amin's favorite songs. Slowly, students formed a large circle, standing arm and arm, taking in the music.

"At first, everyone was just kind of standing and staring, and his friends were in

ally showed up and rallied around his family and friends," Pacheco said.

Family and friends spoke about Amin, sharing memories and messages.

"I am glad that I spoke at [Amin's] celebration of life. I spoke about how he pushed me to be a better competitor and how when we used to race on



the back. And then the kids just kind of started to form this circle. The circle just got bigger and bigger and bigger," Paniagua **said**, "**Towards** the end, his friends just went into the middle of the circle and all stood together. They hugged and cried and had their arms around each other."

On May 4, the Noroozi family held a celebration of life at Acalanes. The event brought people together with food, music, and connection. Community members, friends, and loved ones who gathered at the Acalanes stadium and shared love for and memories of Amin.

"For the celebration of life, it was more of our close-knit community. It was more of an intimate setting, but people re-

the playground, I would always beat him and he would always come back and race again because that was just the type of guy he was and his competitive spirit," Kaplanes-Jones said.

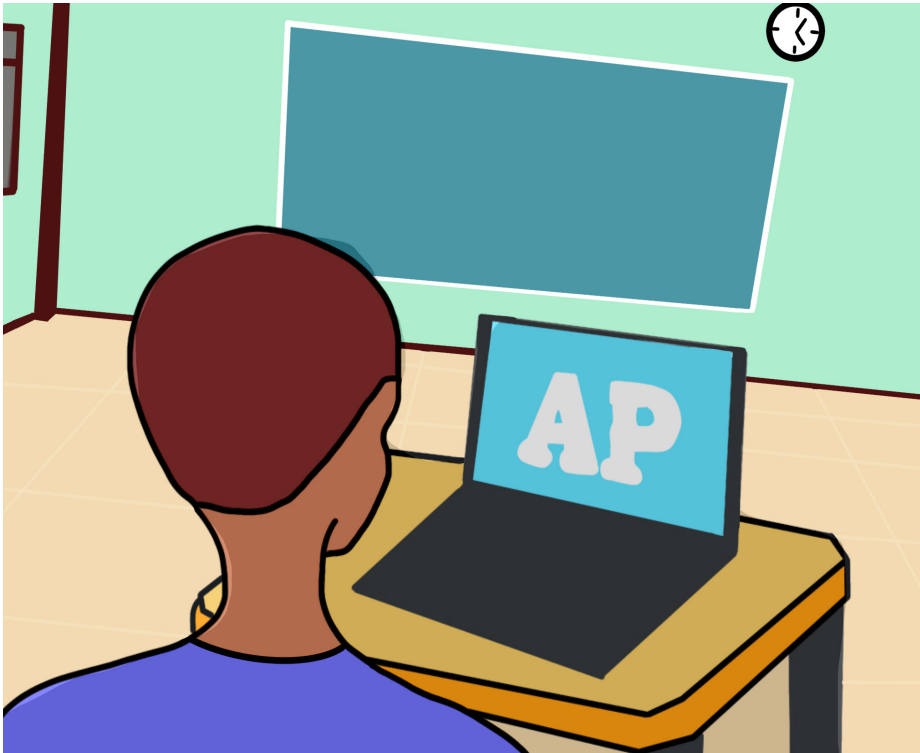
All of the events in honor of Amin allowed the community to gather together to share memories, love, and support in the face of this loss.

"I know he has touched a lot of people...but everyone has come together and made the community closer together, and it just spread a lot of love through the community which was much needed," Kaplanes-Jones said.

**\*Blueprint would like to acknowledge that Susan Martin is related to Audrey Martin, a member of Blueprint staff.**



## FEATURE



### From Paper to Pixels

*Advanced Placement tests' transfer to digital*

Saaj Shah, Mika Katznelson, Sydney Scovic, Samantha Swift, and Cedric He I  
Online Content Manager, Online Editor, Feature Copy Editor, Arts Copy Editor,  
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Graphic by Hank Bauer

A year ago, students sat in the Acalanes gyms, with pencils in their hands moving rapidly. This year, students are moving just as furiously, this time on their computers. As students walked into Advanced Placement (AP) testing centers this May, they encountered a new phenomenon. As of May 2025, 28 out of 40 AP tests were fully digital or hybrid digital.

The College Board has been working to digitize and rework the format of AP testing for the past few years. Last year was the first year that the digital option was implemented. However, many schools, including Acalanes, chose to opt out. This year, Acalanes made 70 percent of their tests digital.

"We could have used the digital platform last year, but we had decided to stay with paper just because we felt like kids do better on paper tests, because you can mark them up and you can write and do your work on paper. We feel like kids don't do that on the online tests. But

this year, we are kind of forced to go to the online platform, which is predicated by the College Board," AP Computer Science Principles and math teacher Alexis Tamony said.

The primary cause for the shift was concerns about test security. In recent years of testing, coordinators and proctors observed increasing attempts to cheat on various AP exams. In addition, schools must store the tests beforehand, creating more opportunities for cheating.

"They're secure because paper materials don't have to be shipped to schools weeks in advance and stored in a secure location. Schools also like that they don't have to pack up students' response materials after the test and ship them back," Director of Communications for the College Board Sara Sympton said.

Administrators also cited the potential for errors in the traditional paper-based grading system, whether that be in test delivery or in the grading process.

"Under the old format, there's a lot of

paperwork and bubbling in and picking of names and collating the test materials that then need to be packaged and shipped. Delivered, unpackaged, and reorganized. So as you can imagine, along that sequence of activities, there's potential room for error," Acalanes Union High School District Associate Superintendent John Walker said.

Aside from increased transparency and academic honesty, the change is also set to improve accessibility for students. The new format increases access to the tests for those who live in remote areas or have disabilities that prevent them from traveling to in-person testing centers.

"Students can take them on any commonly used device, either school-owned or a personal device ... And they're student friendly for a number of reasons, including because students greatly prefer being able to type on a keyboard to compose and edit their answers to the free-response questions, as opposed to using paper and pencil," Sympton said.

While the overall structure and display of the tests are changing, the content of the tests will remain the same. Additionally, the College Board expects to see improvements in the logistics and speed of grading exams, as grading time will be significantly cut down.

"It's going to be a more efficient testing process. And the turnaround on scores is supposedly going to be faster," Walker said.

Many students who have taken AP exams find the new style eases some concerns of standardized testing. To some, the digital shift feels natural, since much of the schoolwork today is online.

"I prefer doing my school work digitally because I am able to express my thoughts more quickly typing versus writing by hand. When I type, it is also easier to delete and reorganize my work whereas when I write it is much more tedious because I have to manually erase and re-write whatever I want to change," junior Bryce Birdsong said.

As the College Board begins to transition to fully digital testing, the question of whether students will perform the same still looms. Some students and teachers are interested in the changes, and believe that it may be beneficial for tests because of the similarity to assignments done for classes.

"I think it is better, though, because a lot of the students are used to being on a device and they are used to doing most of their AP Classroom homework



or just homework on the computer. So I feel like it is better that air is on the computer because it is something that the students are more familiar with versus paper tests," School Registrar Nicole Singleterry said.

While there have been advantages because of the digital format, new problems have also arisen for testing coordinators.

"One challenge that has been brought up has been finding proctors that are comfortable with technology. A lot of the proctors that we have used over the years have been kind of older generations and they are definitely more comfortable and used to paper pencils. So, with everything turning digital, the technology aspect has actually scared a lot of them away. I think that is causing a little more work for the testing coordinator and administration and just finding more help that is comfortable with technology," Singleterry said.

While some people believe that digitizing AP testing will help improve scores and streamline processes, multiple teachers believe that this change will have the opposite effect.

"I believe it will be negative for students. Studies have shown that students actually have higher reading comprehension when they read on paper than when they read on screens. My experience of teaching math and computer science is that any time I ask students to do work

where they are pulling problems from a screen, they tend to stop using pencil and paper to work out their thought process," AP Computer Science A, AP Computer Science Principles, and co-math chair Jennifer Gilson said.

In addition, creating the new digitized test poses potential problems for certain subjects considering the usual format of their test.

"I think the digital [multiple choice questions (MCQ)] is fine. I hope the [free response questions (FRQ)] never goes digital. I don't know how students will draw molecular structures and write formulas quickly and easily even with keyboard shortcuts. Answering free response chemistry questions is not an option digitally," AP Chemistry teacher Daizy Asaravala said.

One difficulty of digital AP exams this year occurred in regards to the reference/formula sheet that certain science and math AP exams. For the AP Biology exam, which was the first exam on Monday, May 5, students struggled to toggle between their reference information and the questions. College Board allowed AP Biology students to take the make-up exam for free as a result, two weeks later. They also encouraged AP coordinators to provide students with printed copies of reference information during exams in the second week of testing.

To help prepare their students for the new format, teachers used College Board practice tests so that students had practice using the features on the Blueprint platform that College Board administers AP exams on. They were able to experiment with tools such as tools to annotate text and eliminate wrong answers.

"Ms. Gilson and I both decided to give multiple practice tests on the digital platform the College Board gives us. So we are trying to give kids an opportunity to practice with the platform before the exam day," Tamony said.

However, some teachers still

prefer paper multiple choice questions because it can allow for annotations by hand that many students feel more comfortable with, as well as support student thinking processes.

"I use AP Classroom and I will give them a test on AP Classroom. It is a formative assessment, not summative. I personally, for the multiple choice, like the paper version ... I like giving the students the opportunity to write on the exam, cross out things, and circle words, particularly on any multiple choice that has reading passage to it," AP Comparative Government and World History teacher Joseph Schottland said.

Similarly, for English classes, many teachers had students practice writing online, in controlled settings similar to the AP test to help them be as prepared as possible for the new platform on exam day.

"Before, I had them handwrite all of their essays. All of their multiple choices they did it on a scantron or pencil and paper. This year we practiced online the whole year. I thought I was going to hate it, and we will see how their scores turnout but I have never seen them write so much. I think typing actually allowed them to compose a longer paper faster," AP Literature and Composition teacher Erin Barth said.

Some students feel that practicing online writing allows students to focus more on the quality of their ideas, as they feel less pressure to race against the clock.

"I definitely think the digital format helped with stress about time, it's still important to answer quickly but it took off the pressure of having to write fast," junior Sophia Terry said. "Knowing I'll have more time to get what I need to say for essay questions like AP Lang, I'm more focusing on how I can develop and expand on my ideas rather than trying to make it short and get my points across."

As many AP exams transition to the digital format, changes to the student testing experience continue to occur, and the switch to online has become part of a larger debate over the effectiveness and impact of digitizing education.

"I think that it is to stay current with the times and be relevant. I think that there are certain things that could stay paper, but I see the need of it going digital because a lot of other things are going digital," AP Testing Coordinator Jamielle McDonald.

*Blueprint Graphic/Sela Sarbiewski*



# The End of an Era

*Retiring teachers reflect on their time at Acalanes*

Maddyx Bride, Sophie Gold, Hannah Geraghty, and Zinnia Khan | Staff Writers

At the close of the 2024-2025 school year, Acalanes High School prepares for the departure of eight staff members. From teaching students about literary classics to tending to the sick and injured, they have been crucial members of the Acalanes community. Before they move on to the next chapter, *Blueprint* invited each of them to reflect on their time on campus.

## Terri Catanessi



*Blueprint* Photo/Isaac Topp

Site Support Technician Terri Catanessi plans to retire this year after 19 years at Acalanes. Her job includes providing technical support to teachers, staff, and students alike. In her nearly

two decades at the school, some of Catanessi's favorite memories include the relationships she's formed with her co-workers and students, as well as exploring technology.

"During my time at Acalanes, I was always learning new things as far as technology [and] enjoying interacting with students, that's how I would describe it," Catanessi said.

Catanessi also appreciated the dynamic nature of her job and working with ever-evolving technology.

"I [enjoyed] meeting fun people and just really learning new stuff all the time ... because technology is always changing and I think it's fun," Catanessi said.

When her time at Acalanes comes to an end, Catanessi has plans in motion to enjoy her retirement through traveling and hobbies.

"I have a trip to Maui planned already, and I'm going to take hula lessons, not in Hawaii but when I come back here.

Traveling, gardening, reading, and hopefully having some grandchildren soon," Catanessi said.

Catanessi has been surprised by how quickly her final year has gone by at Acalanes, as she prepares for retirement.

"It's gone by fast. I sort of thought it would go by slow, but it's gone by fast. It's a little bittersweet I would also say. I like my job, but I decided it's time to get off the hamster wheel.

I've been trying to enjoy every day that I've been here and just make the best of it," Catanessi said.

Catanessi looks back fondly on the atmosphere and culture of Acalanes.

She reflects on the community and relationships she made during her time on campus.

"Acalanes is a wonderful school... the camaraderie here is fun, you feel it from the students and the staff," Catanessi said.

## Cathy Challacombe



*Blueprint* Photo/Isaac Topp

After teaching for 25 years at Acalanes, English teacher Cathy "Chally" Challacombe is retiring. In her time at the school, Challacombe

taught a variety of classes including drama, leadership, and French, as well as previously directing the school musical and representing the teacher's union.

"I've done a lot of different things here. So I'd say some of the high points [are] that I've gotten to work with a lot of people, not just people in my department," Challacombe said.

Prior to working at Acalanes, Challacombe worked in public relations and hospitality. She eventually started teaching classes about food and wine, inspiring her to go back to school for her teaching credential. While teaching was a large adjustment, Challacombe found accomplishment in her new career.

"Fantastic. The greatest job of my life, some of my best years ever. Highly fulfilling. Very annoying at times. Exciting. It's gonna be really, really, hard to leave," Challacombe said.

Looking back on her time at Acalanes,

Challacombe found a community in her coworkers, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when students remained at home.

"It was quiet but we really supported each other. It was nice in its own way, the relationship that I have with teachers and other faculty on campus like gardeners and administrators has been really a long, fruitful, intellectually strong, exciting experience," Challacombe said.

Post-retirement, Challacombe plans on moving and getting involved in her new community, as well as pursuing a variety of hobbies.

"I'm mostly interested in helping [students] write their college application essays ... I hope to continue to take classes," Challacombe said. "I'll definitely be doing some gardening, definitely doing some pickling, and I'll go back to making sauerkraut."

## Dvora Citron



 Photo/Studio One

Acalanes' school nurse, Dvora Citron, is retiring after working at Acalanes for 21 years. Prior to her work at Acalanes, Citron worked as a nurse in the maternal infant ward at Alta Bates Summit Medical Center.

"Taking care of newborns and moms who've

just had babies, I loved that. It was really exciting, but then I had three kids of my own," Citron said. "Another friend of mine who was a nurse convinced me to go into school nursing. She said then you can work the same days and hours as your kids because you'll be in school, so I did that."

During her time at the school, Citron developed many new programs at Acalanes. She helped create a senior health symposium, the Red Watch Band program, which teaches students about alcohol intoxication, and CPR with the Acalanes yoga program.

"I worked with Oakwood Athletic Club, we had this collaboration with them. They basically donated many of their teachers to come here and do some and they did pilates and yoga in the PE classes," Citron said. "We didn't have yoga yet and everybody really liked that and then after that our school started teaching yoga."

Citron is very passionate about health and is planning to continue focusing on

the field after retirement.

"I love this job, but I decided a few years ago to shift to a new career in health coaching. I have a blog called Slant2Plants and I do a newsletter. I'm really passionate about lifestyle medicine, basically like healthy lifestyle habits, especially healthy eating, exercise and getting good sleep. I'm retiring from this position but I'm now excited to go on a new road that kind of overlaps," Citron said.

The nurse enjoyed the school environment and getting to know the students at Acalanes.

"I loved being in the presence of teenagers because I think it's just exciting and dynamic ... You might take care of me one day. If you go to medical school and become a doctor then you might be my doctor one day, or you might be my banker one day. Or you might work somewhere and I might be your customer. I just feel like I'm investing in you," Citron said.

## John Crain



Blueprint Photo/Isaac Topp

Library Media Technician and former coach John Crain is retiring after working for Acalanes off and on since 1988. He first served as a girls' basketball coach but since then has served as head track coach, Unified track coach, instructional aide, and library media technician.

"I've enjoyed it, I've enjoyed all aspects of it. I enjoyed being in room 511, I really enjoyed being the head track coach for 11 years, and I just like the kids. I've had a very good experience and met lots of great people," Crain said.

Before working in education, Crain had a career in sales but later transitioned into coaching. He coached track and field at Carondelet and De La Salle, where he had a record of 11 league division championships in his 14 years there. After coming to Acalanes, he continued this winning streak and set multiple records, and even worked to implement Unified Sports.

"In the girls four by 100 and four by four we set three or four track records multiple times. The boys four by four in 2014 just missed going to state by one place and improved by almost ten seconds. Then I had a great time with those kids in 511, I have a lot of respect for them and I learned a lot about special education. And then from that to Unified sports, which we brought to Acalanes starting with track," Crain said.

Crain emphasized the hardworking and well-rounded students at Acalanes and commended students for being involved in a variety of activities at a high level and is excited to see what they do with their futures.

"So many students I have here on teams were also in choir, or other sports, and clubs, and had strong academics. They are just really well-rounded students and for that I am really proud and can't wait to see what they accomplish,"

Crain said.

Overall, Crain appreciated his time at Acalanes and made friends in both students and faculty.

"I just enjoyed the kids and the teachers here, I enjoyed the school. I have a lot of friends I met here, both students and faculty, and I think the whole atmosphere here was amazing. It's a great place to be," Crain said.



Blueprint Graphic/Sela Sarbiewski



## Ken Derr



Blueprint Photo/Isaac Topp

English Teacher Ken Derr began his teaching career at Acalanes in 1991, where he

instructed for eight years before taking a one year hiatus. He returned the following year and has taught at Acalanes since for 33 total years at the school.

In his decades of teaching, Derr has taught a variety of subjects, including world history, psychology, and an array of English classes. His favorite class to teach was English 3 Honors, because of his love for the students enrolled.

"You generally had a bunch of kids who actually enjoyed reading and talking about ideas. They wrote more and got more feedback, so watching them improve and develop their own voice was particularly satisfying for them and for me," Derr said.

In his 33 years, Derr reflects positively on the bonds he's built with his students and recalls the success of his students.

"The highlights would be the relationships you develop with so many kids along the way, when you hear back from them and they're doing amazing things," Derr said.

Derr hopes his students will remember him for the experiences.

"Hopefully [they remember] that I tried to make each class period engaging, that I tried to provoke their thinking, and that I tried to give them windows into parts of the world," Derr said.

Derr hopes that his students will carry their love for literature into the world beyond high school English.

"Art in the form of literature can help them think about their own lives and connect to the world outside of them," Derr said.

## Erik Honda



Blueprint Photo/Isaac Topp

English teacher Erik Honda is retiring after 34 years of teaching, including 28 years at

Acalanes and 20 years as the chair of the Acalanes High School Union District (AUHSD) Diversity Committee.

"[The committee] was all four sites... collaborating with people from Miramonte and [Campolindo] and Las Lomas on integrating our diverse populations... It's just powerful to see students being activists around those issues at school," Honda said.

Following his retirement, Honda plans to continue his role as an activist and envisions becoming more involved in his community. In his 28 years at Acalanes, he's seen Acalanes and its students go through many changes.

"When I started, it was like 1997, it was the very early internet days and before cell phones and everything like that, so I've seen changes in students

that are a result of that. Some good, some bad. The good is that students know a lot more about the world," Honda said.

Reflecting on his career, Honda hopes that his students and colleagues will recognize him for his passion and purpose behind his work.

"I have flaws, so I don't expect them to ignore my flaws, but to try to understand all the obnoxiousness that they got from me from time to time was probably in pursuit of what I thought was a higher calling or just cause, so hopefully people will remember that about me. My students know that everything I was doing was for their benefit, to try and help them and make them better students and better people," Honda said.

## Heidi Skvarna



Blueprint Photo/Isaac Topp

Spanish teacher Heidi Skvarna is retiring after 26 years of teaching at Acalanes. During her

time at the school, she taught Spanish and assisted with Staff Development.

"I love and adore seeing students' language develop ... I was also involved in different committees and different groups, and I've enjoyed my time getting to know the students in a different way," Skvarna said.

Skvarna taught Spanish in Illinois before moving to the Bay Area, and has since found a sense of community in teaching at Acalanes.

"When I moved here, I had one friend and my husband," Skvarna said. "Teaching and my faith were the two things that grounded me here."

Though she is ready to move on from her time at Acalanes, Skvarna feels bittersweet about leaving.

"I look at my students now and know

that this is the final class that I'll have and I can get a little teary about it. The students don't know, well my first period knows it, but I'll tell them at the end of the year. It makes it even that much more special because I know it's the last time I'll be doing all this," Skvarna said.

While Skvarna is undecided about what she'll do with her spare time after retiring, she is considering many options.

"I'm still working [things] out. Maybe getting a dog, another dog because our dog passed away, traveling, my husband's not retiring yet so visiting family in the Midwest. Maybe coming back here and visiting and subbing potentially. I'm not sure," Skvarna said.

# Lisa Wright



Blueprint Photo/Isaac Topp

Campus gardener Lisa Wright started in the AUHSD in 1994, and since then she has worked at several of the schools in the district throughout her career.

"I started with the school district in '94, but at Las Lomas and Del Valle, came here in '98 and I've been here ever since," Wright said. "It's been fun and unique in different ways. I love the kids."

After 27 years on the Acalanes campus, she feels like a part of the Acalanes family.

"It's like a family here. I mean you feel like you're welcomed, whereas in some schools you're not, it depends. But I feel like it's one big family," Wright said.

Wright's decision to retire comes from reaching the maximum compensation for her job. During her retirement, she plans to spend her time playing bocce ball and bowling.

"[I'm retiring] this year because it's time. [It's] been 31 years and with the [California Public Employees' Retirement System] I have to retire with, I'm at 100 percent and I can't go any further, so it's time to walk away," Wright said.

As she moves onto the next stage of her life, Wright hopes that students will embrace their time at Acalanes.

"Just enjoy your life and have fun. Don't get too stressed ... You just take it one day at a time and you live it to the fullest," Wright said.



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# LOCAL GOVERNMENT BRIEFS

Mika Katznelson and Shiraz Kamran | Online Editor and Staff Writer

## City Council

The Lafayette City Council held its bimonthly meetings on April 14 and 28, and May 12. The public can access the meeting's minutes, agenda, and audio on the City of Lafayette website, and the council posts a livestream of the meeting on the City of Lafayette's YouTube channel. Community members can also virtually join the meeting on Zoom through the city website. For the meeting, the council opened with a closed session followed by public comments.

During the April 14 and 28 meetings, the council discussed legal limits on regulating protests near schools and decided to gather more legal and safety-related information before deciding on new regulations. However, they still heard from parents, school staff, and crossing guards regarding these protests, mainly on the potential increased risk to students' safety.

Additionally, on April 14, they unanimously voted to oppose State Housing Bill 79, which would have allowed transit agencies such as Bay Area Rapid Transit to control land use on or near their property.

In the April 28 meeting, the Environmental Task Force updated the council on leaf blower electrification and future foodware ordinances that target single-use items. They spoke of the challenges of enforcing bans and suggested solutions such as educating the public on the negative environmental effects.

In the first of the bimonthly meetings on May 12, the mayor led the meeting with a land acknowledgement and highlighted the installation of two Bay Miwok heritage signs that honor the indigenous roots of the community. During the meeting, the council discussed major infrastructure updates regarding the 2025 pavement planning and Accessory Dwelling Unit grant initiatives as part of a long-term commitment to support affordable housing.

## Governing Board

The Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Governing Board held its regular meeting on April 16, 2025. The public can access the meeting's agenda, minutes, and livestream through the AUHSD website. The meeting was held in person at the District Office Community Room with a closed session followed by public comment.

The Board began its April 16 meeting by passing a resolution designating May 6 as National Teacher Day, May 14 as California Day of the Teacher, and May 5 to 9 as National Teacher Appreciation Week.

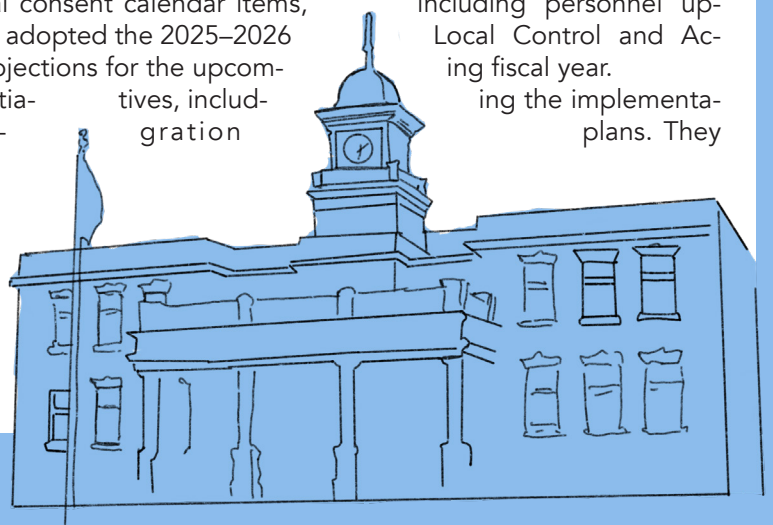
The Board then authorized changes to field trip requests, salary schedules, and a number of Board policies pertaining to employee security, pay, and drug and alcohol awareness.

The Board later heard updated enrollment estimates for the 2025–2026 school year, which were slightly higher than earlier estimates. They also reviewed and approved the 2026–2027 academic calendar.

In the May 7 meeting, the Board approved several consent calendar items, including personnel updates, service contracts, and policy revisions. They also adopted the 2025–2026 Local Control and Accountability Plan and discussed preliminary budget projections for the upcoming fiscal year.

Later, the Board reviewed updates on district-wide initiatives, including the implementation of new instructional materials and technology integration plans. They also heard reports on student achievement metrics and campus safety measures.

Finally, the meeting concluded with updates from student representatives on campus events, a report from the Executive Cabinet on district-wide matters, and a final adjournment.







## Bikini Bottom Hits the Stage

*Acalanes Performing Arts hosts their annual spring play*

Levand Koopah and Avery Robb | Staff Writers

Photo by Avery Robb

The pineapple under the sea made its way to the stage in Acalanes' new spring musical *SpongeBob: The Musical*. The Acalanes Performing Arts' final production of the school year inspired anticipation as students watched a childhood show take the stage.

Andie Patterson, the director, chose this year's production for a variety of reasons, one being the strong emphasis on communities uniting throughout the musical.

"I think it was possibly chosen because [it was SpongeBob's 25th anniversary.] It has a lot to do about community and coming together from going from panic and desperation to then transitioning more to everyone coming together in acceptance," lead actor and junior Sean McNeil said.

SpongeBob SquarePants is a beloved children's television show that many Acalanes students grew up watching, creating a connection for the audience.

"I think it was very different. Everyone knows SpongeBob the [television] show, and I think they went about transforming it into a play in a very cool way that was different from a traditional high school play. I think everyone in the cast and crew put their whole heart into the show," at-

tendee and senior Addy Treter said.

Once each department in the musical solidified their roles through auditions, they joined to bring the production together as one whole. The departments include the ensemble, main characters, and cast.

"To set the scene, we had this thing called a sitz probe. We come together with the band to combine the parts, and then progressively we add our choreography and the lighting, and the set, and overall it takes some time to put all the pieces together," McNeil said.

Individually, the performers spent hours in preparation to fully take on their roles and embody the nostalgic characters many recognize.

"This musical stands out because it involves so many beloved characters. Playing a character that so many people know is a little daunting, because you want to do it right, but you also want to be able to feel like the character is your own," actor and senior Bee Reinsberg said.

The musical featured a variety of songs that the directors adapted from the original show, and others were written specifically for the Broadway production.

"[The song] 'Best Day Ever' was my favorite song to do because...it's a song from the TV show that's adapted to fit the musical. [The song] is probably the most optimistic song in the whole show while also posing as an acceptance piece as Bikini Bottom comes to terms with what will happen. Being able to perform that each and every night felt magical every single time," McNeil said.

Beyond the musical numbers themselves, some thought the sets brought the world of Bikini Bottom to life. From the classic neon flower lights to the constantly changing backdrops, many believed that the attention to detail brought the whole show together.

"I really liked the sets, the hanging flower lights that would change color throughout the play were super cool. I also really enjoyed the scene where they were climbing the volcano, it was really innovative," Treter said.

According to audience members, this year's musical pushed the creative limits in set design, as students worked to create large scale sets, including a volcano in the musical.

"I think this year was really creative in how they did sets and costumes... They did a good job with scenes that could be hard to do, like having a volcano. Not a lot of musicals have hard things to act out in. 'SpongeBob' did and it was interesting how they did that," attendee and junior Maya Shoenhair said.

While performing the musical is fun for many students, some feel the people they worked with made the experience.

"The people in this program are the best people I have ever met. I've been friends with them even before I started the program. But now that I was able to join and spend so much time with them, it created a bond unlike anything else, and they are just such great people," actor and junior Teagan Frase said.

For many seniors in the cast, the show marked the end of their high school performing arts journey. After years of performing at Acalanes, saying goodbye was emotional yet meaningful.

"Theater is like a second home to me. It's where so many of my friends are, and where I feel like I can be myself," Reinsberg said. "This final production means so much to me. I feel so proud of what we have made, and I'm going to miss this experience so much. It felt like such a celebration, it was like one big, colorful party."

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## Double Treble

*Expressing time through music in Interstellar*

Gwyneth Lee and Noah Frankel | Print Feature Editor and Online Editor

Graphic by Sela Sabriewski



Music is always connected to time. It serves as a way for composers to express feelings through rhythm, tempo, and other musical elements. Music can make its own time, where the audience is either on the edge of their seat waiting for the next note, or watching a flurry of notes fly by in an instant. Music creates a unique timeline that is nonlinear and is controlled by the composer and the conductor. It allows performers to guide audience members through a journey that can change their perspective of reality.

Many people often hail Christopher Nolan's 2014 film *Interstellar* as one of the most visually appealing and atmospheric films of all time, and one major reason is the soundtrack. The film follows a group of astronauts who travel through a wormhole to find a new planet for humanity as Earth faces environmental collapse. The score composer, Hans Zimmer, has won two Academy Awards, the British Academy of Film and Television Arts, and five Grammy Awards. The Emmy and Tony Awards committees have nominated

Zimmer for three Emmy Awards and a Tony Award. His score for *Interstellar* is nothing short of awe-inspiring through the sheer amount of emotion he conveys through his music.

One of the most fascinating techniques he uses is the ticking clock, also known as a time endpoint. Screenwriter John Truby wrote in his book, *The Anatomy of Story*, that the "time endpoint speeds up the narrative drive, ramps up the stakes, and makes the characters have to do something by a certain point." While this might make the film more dramatic, it comes at the expense of subtlety, and can be obvious to the point that it draws the audience's attention away from the film, like a ticking time bomb.

To avoid this clear reveal, Zimmer incorporates the ticking into the music, rather than the image, with the track "Mountains." In the scene, the crew arrives at a planet where, due to time dilation caused by increased gravity and a nearby black hole, every hour is seven years back on Earth. The track starts at 48

beats per minute and gradually increases to 60 bpm, as the crew realizes the true danger of the planet. The time endpoint ramps up the stakes and gives the audience a sense of thrill and danger. Time is even more important, as on this planet, each second that passes is equivalent to a full day on Earth.

Suspense and tensions rise with every tick as time painfully slips away. The viewers watch helplessly as the crew realizes that their crewmate has died and that they must escape the planet. The music crescendos and increases in intensity until it finally takes off.

After a narrow escape, the crew goes back to the ship to find out they have lost 23 years on Earth due to their mistakes. Zimmer makes his music both terrifying and breathtaking, mainly with a human-like organ and piano, which gives chills to everyone listening.

Zimmer effectively uses the time endpoint to engage his audience and engross them in *Interstellar*, and uses this method in many of his other films, such as *Dunkirk* and *Inception*. He sparks a sense of urgency and focus in the scenes, though music does not always need a storyline for the listener to foster an emotional connection. Many modern artists use other psychological tricks, but for slightly different goals.

In the modern age of media, artists are constantly trying to retain as much attention as possible. They often optimize the length and speed of their music to increase the number of streams. Many songs are shorter to balance shorter attention spans and have accelerated intros to hook the listener. Many artists use these front-load hooks to create a compressed version of the time endpoint effect. These hooks are often combined with increased tempos to create a heightened sense of urgency.

The time endpoint's influence spans beyond the domain of film and cinematic scores. These kinds of psychological ploys utilize intersections between the realms of music and time to craft emotional intimacy for the listener.

Composers such as Hans Zimmer can enhance a film to an incredible extent, intensifying the drama and building suspense. It is hard to put into words how Zimmer can manipulate emotion to such a great extent; the only way to appreciate it is to listen to it.

## Book Nook

Commemorating Acalanés' early Pride Month celebration  
Spread by Cara Hamilton

### **It's Not Like It's a Secret by Misa Sugiura**

Maddie Obertello | Print Sports Editor

*with and not different in mind from, heterosexuality."*

*"Asking for acceptance and equal rights isn't selfish. It wouldn't be an issue at all if other people accepted them instead of thinking of them as freaks."*

Misa Sugiura's heartfelt coming-of-age novel *It's Not Like It's a Secret* explores the personal journey of a teen, Sana Kiyohara, navigating her sense of identity, relationships, and cultural expectations. Starting with Kiyohara's move from Wisconsin to California, the book introduces the internal struggles she faces as she suspects her father of having an affair. This confrontation of feelings sparks Kiyohara to question her sexuality.

Kiyohara's story unfolds as she begins a new chapter at her new, diverse California high school, where she meets Jamie Ramirez, a girl she eventually falls for. The relationship's journey is complicated by cultural tensions, racial dynamics, and her family's traditional values. These contrasting aspects shape her understanding of love, loyalty, and identity while adapting to her new environment. As she begins to embrace her identity, Kiyohara must face long-held secrets and the consequences of silence to grow. *It's Not Like It's a Secret* highlights honesty, self-acceptance, and courage as Kiyohara matures.

*We Are Everywhere* by Matthew Reimer and Leighton Brown presents a compelling narrative of LGBTQ+ liberation, tracing the movement from its early roots to the present day. The book begins with an examination of mid-20th-century gay and lesbian activist groups such as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis. While these groups sought to promote acceptance and social support through networking opportunities and legal advice, they often encouraged conformity by focusing on assimilation and respectability. They did not fully address the problems faced by LGBTQ+ individuals. The frustration of the community would lead to the 1969 Stonewall Uprising in New York

City, which marked a monumental shift in how people would rebel against discrimination. The story continues through the 1970s and 1980s tracking the experiences and fight for human rights by LGBTQ+ individuals.

Reimer and Brown depict each era with powerful historical photographs and insightful commentary, giving a voice to those often overlooked. *We Are Everywhere* is more than a historical account; it is a tribute to the resilience and courage of generations who fought for equality, and a reminder that the struggle is ongoing.

### **You Should See Me in a Crown by Leah Johnson**

Audrey Tugade | Print Feature Editor

*"This town has never been good at allowing people to be their full, imperfect-but-still-worthy selves."*

*"Homosexuality is not a sickness, disturbance, or other pathology in any sense, but is merely a preference, orientation, or propensity, on par*

*with a* Leah Johnson's critically acclaimed debut novel, *You Should See Me in a Crown*, has won the Stonewall Book Award honor. The book delves into the journey of Liz Lightly, a teen girl who

dreams of being the prom queen for her school. She struggles with her insecurity and society's judgment while navigating high school as a lesbian and black person.

Johnson ends the novel on a hopeful note, revealing that Lightly finds acceptance, not just from her community, but herself. Johnson's book conveys the hardships and the strengths of the LGBTQ+ community through Lightly's journey. This novel is a good read for adults, teens, and pre-teens as it follows a traditional young-adult novel structure.

Overall, the novel is a powerful and uplifting book that leaves a lasting impact.

### **Patsy by Nicole Dennis-Benn**

Zinnia Khan | Staff Writer

*"Maybe that's how it is—maybe life favors certain people and relegates the rest to living in their shadows."*

In her 2019 novel *Patsy*, Jamaican author Nicole Dennis-Benn examines the intersectionality between poverty, racism, and homophobia. The story's protagonist, named Patsy, is a young single mother in Jamaica, where she lives with her devoutly Christian mother and young daughter. Though she loves her family, she dreams of obtaining an American travel visa to visit Cicely, her long-time friend and former lover, who moved to New York years before.

When Patsy obtains the opportunity, she leaves her daughter and mother behind to chase dreams that fail to live up to her expectations. Patsy is faced with the startling reality of betrayal and self-suppression, as well as the guilt of leaving her child behind. Through these emotions and obstacles, Dennis-Benn's novel offers up a vital portrait of the chasms between selfhood and motherhood, the American dream and reality.

### **We Are Everywhere by Matthew Reimer and Leighton Brown**

Brown

Grace Wolpert | Business and Social Media Manager

WE ARE EVERYWHERE

*you should see me in a crown*

• PATSY •



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## ARTIST OF THE ISSUE

*The experiences, perspective, and attitude of Acalanes' artistic instructor and inspiration*

Melina Galacatos and Audrey Parkin | Online Editors-in-Chief  
Photo by Robert Porter



Hundreds of students fill their canvas with paint strokes and coloring in the 2D art room, all extensively guided by teacher Robert Porter.

Porter influences his students with his extensive background in the arts. As a child, he enjoyed creative play, but he did not completely dedicate himself until college.

"In high school, I started taking [art] classes, [but] I wasn't super invested. It wasn't until college that my childhood excitement for art was rekindled," Porter said.

He attended the University of California, Santa Barbara, initially on the pre-med track. While there, college art classes and professors inspired his passion for art, and he changed majors to pursue it. He attended graduate school at the San Francisco Art Institute, then became a high school art teacher, while maintaining his artistic practice.

"I am an artist first and an educator second. I have a studio at home. I am a practicing artist, and I show my work regionally, although not as much as I should be. I look forward to the summertime, and

one day [when] I will have more time in the studio," Porter said.

When creating art, Porter finds inspiration in the relationship between contrasting objects and humans with the environment.

"I am interested in... systems and relationships between the very grand and the very minute. I am interested in landscape, and exploring our relationship to the land and what that means," Porter said.

He has a deep understanding of artists' roles in the world, which he believes in communicating to young minds.

"I think it's important that kids understand that art is not decoration. It's not something you hang above your couch—that's furniture," Porter said. "Art is about ideas, and communicating ideas; critiquing culture, vivifying culture. It's about people for people, it's not about matching the curtains with your sofa."

Porter acknowledges that art can be a catalyst for considering timeless questions. He feels it endures evolution and can be applied to developing ideas.

"Art is the same questions, just re-

clothed through time, addressed to an audience for now. The ideas are perennial, the need is perennial, the face, the facade can be new materials," Porter said.

Despite his limited time dedicated to his craft, students notice his creativity and ideas through illustrating and teaching.

"I definitely would say that he is creative. I think he doesn't show it all the time through his art, because we don't see it that often ... the sketches that he does at his table, and when he [advises] what to do and mediums to use, I think it does influence us," junior Lucy Love said.

Years of experience as a student, artist, and educator have taught Porter the refinement of art education, which he considers to help guide his students.

"Going to school sometimes is really hard, it's the instructor's job sometimes to critique you, and sometimes that can cut, but be able to understand it's not you they're talking about, it's your work. Be able to differentiate yourself, then take a note and learn from it, or not," Porter said.

His understanding of art and art education led many to consider him an encouraging instructor.

"He is willing to help and critique positively in order to help us grow as artists," junior Addison Burton said.

Additionally, his years of being a practicing artist have given Porter a wide variety of technical skills to pass on. He typically mixes multiple mediums, especially watercolor, acrylic, and oil paints.

"Because of the [art supplies] that he has used, he is able to teach us better on what to do for our projects," Love said.

Porter stays true to his perspective on the importance of art by pushing his own students to pursue a higher standard than what they believe to be their limit.

"I like that he pushes us to do something that we [usually] wouldn't. There are so many projects that I never would have gone that far, or used that media, or chosen that idea, but Porter really pushes those ideas that take you out of your comfort zone," Love said.

Porter believes art is a skill that can be explored by anybody interested in developing their creativity.

"If you want to be an artist, or any serious thinker, it's not about having the ability to do it. The skill can be acquired, or there are ways around it. ... The idea is what's important," Porter said.

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## QUOTE OF THE ISSUE



*"I have stitched together a self from stolen scraps" – Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street**

Aamena Shipchandler | Print Managing Editor

Graphic by Sof Cerruti

I make the ultimate mosaic. Although my loved ones may never know, from my most mundane habits to how I look, I have stolen, piece by piece, each part of myself.

I stole my eyes from my mom, and her mom. They represent emeralds, spring leaves after the rain. The eyes of both dark, lush forests and wild, untamed meadows. When the people I love look into my eyes, they don't see me: they see generations of women, whose experiences, feelings, and beliefs combine to make me. My eyes, my mom's eyes, my Nani's eyes, are the eyes I see the world through today. It's the scrap I hold the most dearly.

I stole my hair from my grandmother, whose curls I never got to see enough of. I may not wear them often, but when I do, I am her. When I wear my curls, I see her short, brown, but almost red, bouncy curls. They remind me of rose petals,

the light glowing on her golden strands like light coming in from a window. I see young childhood memories with her, trips to Naperville, making pinecone and flower bouquets in the garden. I see my grandfather, who says that as I grow older, I begin to look just like her. I am her when I have my curls.

From my dad, I took his calendars, his planning, and his focus. The same designing and drafting he does in his daily to-do lists, I do in mine. Each color I pick for my calendar reminds me of him, each folder I make I took from him. When I feel unmotivated or uninspired, I think of what I've stolen from him, years of organization and planning that have gotten me to where I am today, the same work ethic he's had for 51 years.

I stole my knowledge from my brother, though not in the traditional sense. Each time I work, as I bite the inside of my lips in focus, I transform into him, absorbing

his comprehension, his consciousness. What started as trying to figure out why my brother chewed his lips turned into my daily habit. Now, as I learn, I do the same, metamorphosing into him, his studying, learning, and vast knowledge.

They say imitation is the best form of flattery, and I take that saying seriously. Not because I lack a sense of self, but because I've found myself in the people I love: my stolen scraps. Each phrase I've tucked into my vocabulary, each laugh I've stolen, each gesture that I've adopted without even realizing—these are pieces of myself. I have stitched together myself from stolen scraps: not in spite of love, but because of it.

Maybe that is the most beautiful form of identity: a combination of every soul who has loved me enough to leave a mark, every soul I've loved to let that mark stay.



# Studio Walls and College Halls

*Students pursuing the arts through higher education*

Maya Stafford, Gwyneth Lee, Cypress Reid, and Justin Rosenblatt | Head  
Section Editor, Print Feature Editor, Print Opinion Editor, and Staff Writer

Whether it's late nights spent in the theater or paint-streaked hands, creativity comes in many forms. For many Acalanes seniors these forms of creativity are more than pastimes or hobbies. These moments mark the beginnings of their careers in the arts. As some Acalanes seniors near graduation, they will have the opportunity to pursue their passions in college. These students have spent their time at Acalanes carefully sculpting their skills from sketchbooks to spotlights.

## Emily Bennett - Game Art



Courtesy Photo/Emily Bennett

Senior Emily Bennett has pursued her interest in art since she was young, however, she discovered her passion for game art during high school.

"I specialize in digital painting and concept art. That includes things like making designs for characters or environments, as well as portrait making. Mostly character design, though," Bennett said.

Bennett is committed to the University of Southern California (USC) for their game art program and will be heading there this fall to grow her knowledge on the game industry.

"I'll be doing a variety of things ... [such as] expanding into 3D work, animation, and just learning more things about the game industry in general," Bennett said.

Bennett utilizes art as an outlet for her thoughts and ideas and has decided to pursue game concept art as a career to dedicate her life to after her time at USC.

"I don't want to live for money, and I don't want to make money just to live. I want to live to live, and art is my life [...] It's less that it's something that I want to do, but it's more of a need," Bennett said.

## Michael LaFond - Illustration



Courtesy Photo/Michael LaFond

Senior Michael LaFond is ready to practice illustration at the School of Visual Arts. Since he was little, working for illustration companies has always been a huge aspiration that he believes this opportunity could set him up for.

"Hopefully, I can work in some sort of entertainment field, whether it's backgrounds or storyboarding or really anything, just some type of entertainment stuff. The dream studio would probably be either Dreamworks or Sony, but I'll take anything in the entertainment

field," LaFond said.

For LaFond, illustration is a creative, irreplaceable outlet that brings joy, which inspires it as a potential career option. Seeing his art come to life fuels his passion for the craft.

"[My favorite part is] just getting my ideas out there. It's one thing to think about something, and another to see it and make it on a page. [And] being able to think of something cool and then be able to show other people that idea," LaFond said.

## Bee Reinsberg - Playwriting



Courtesy Photo/Bee Reinsberg

Senior Bee Reinsberg plans their love for writing and acting out stories at the University of California, Davis. Reinsberg has a variety of inspirations for their work that have pushed them to pursue an English major, where they will explore playwriting.

"'Rumors', the show that I did in sophomore year, influenced a lot of my humor, whereas other books I've read like *Handmaid's Tale*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, books like that have influenced a lot of my writing style," Reinsberg said.

From a young age, Reinsberg has been writing and acting out stories in their free time. Recently, they began to adapt their writing for the stage, directing "To Beat a Dead Ghost" for the senior short plays in the spring of this year.

"My favorite project ever has got to be my senior short play. It was one of the most fun things I have ever created, and seeing that adapted on stage was amazing, and I love all of my actors so much," Reinsberg said.



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## Eli Sessums - Video Production



Courtesy Photo/Eli Sessums

Senior Eli Sessums hopes to transfer to the University of California, Berkeley to pursue media studies after some time at Diablo Valley College. Her favorite aspect of video production is the ability to transform an idea through editing.

"After filming, probably the most important and my favorite part is the editing and bringing it all together ... With editing, you can change the whole story and make it into something else entirely...you have so many ways you can change just a simple video into something else entirely," Sessums said.

Sessums plans to work in advertisements following college because she believes it is a practical way to pursue videography. It provides an outlet for her to share her art with others before she tries to get into the film industry.

"[Advertising] seems like the most realistic way to use videography as a form of making money. But it's something because I want others to see what I make, and I want to be able to share that with other people." Sessums said.

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## Rohini Vrajmohan - Music



Courtesy Photo/Rohini Vrajmohan

Senior Rohini Vrajmohan will continue her musical journey and improve her skills as a jazz musician at the University of Washington next fall.

"I have chosen to pursue [music] in college because it is my passion, and I want to be able to hone that skill more and more. I want to learn more from professionals to eventually become one," Vrajmohan said.

Vrajmohan has pursued music since a young age, and has played a variety of

instruments. She originally started on violin, though she moved to playing trumpet in fourth grade.

"I began to play music when I was super little, maybe three or four, and I started on violin. But what really inspired me to play trumpet was the book *The Trumpet of the Swan*. When I read that book in third grade, I immediately knew that I was going to play the trumpet," Vrajmohan said.

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## Maddie Walsh - Art and Product Design



Courtesy Photo/Maddie Walsh

Senior Maddie Walsh will explore both physical and digital artistic mediums by pursuing arts and product design at the University of Oregon. She describes the digital design class at Acalanes as an important influence on her choice of major.

"[When] I started taking [Chris] Busse's class, I completely switched. I just fell in love with it. The first week, I fell in love with it," Walsh said.

As she has learned the ins and outs of artistry over her years of practice, Walsh has selected her preferred crafts.

"I definitely like ceramics and digital

design, I love doing stuff with my hands, like [clay-work], [and] I really started enjoying digital design when I started taking [that] class," Walsh said.

Maddie Walsh has made her mark at Acalanes and hopes to further her knowledge in college.

"Throughout about 150 kids a year, I see a handful of students that have really, really awesome potential to do really good things," Digital Design teacher Chris Busse said.

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## Hanna Ward - Film and Media Studies



Courtesy Photo/Hanna Ward

Senior Hanna Ward's interest in film began at a young age, and she cites the media she consumed as a chief source of inspiration. She plans on transferring to the University of California, Santa Barbara after attending Santa Barbara City College.

"I'd say I'm particularly interested in cinematography. I really love the art that goes into making shots, like really beautiful and telling a story through frames and stuff," Ward said.

Although she did not take video

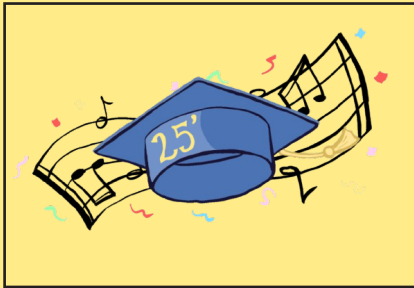
production at Acalanes, Ward gained experience through taking digital design. Some of her teachers believe she excels because of the effort she puts into her assignments.

"Hanna is a fantastic graphic designer, and I know she won't admit it ... She has done Digital Design I and II. She's very, very good at any type of assignment I put out. She does really excellent work," Busse said.

# BlueTunes

*Nostalgic tracks for graduation and the end of the school year*

Maya Stafford and Molly Jones | Head Section Editor and Azure Editor-in-Chief



The weather gets warmer, flowers bloom, and school comes to an end. With this, it pains many to say goodbye to seniors who are graduating and pursuing the next chapter of their lives. These tracks will place you in a world of nostalgia and allow you to reminisce on high school memories gone by.





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## WHAT DONS ARE ROCKING AT PROM 2025

AYA O'NEAL, OLIVIA SILVERSTEIN, AND CARA HAMILTON |  
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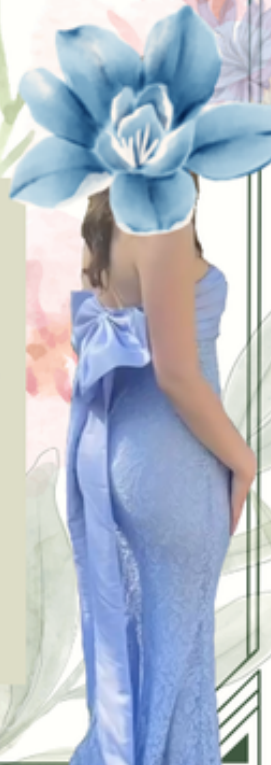
On Saturday, April 19, Acalanes hosted its Night at The Prom, where Dons were dressed to impress at one of the most anticipated events of one's high school experience. Prom dress styles have changed throughout the decades, but certain styles and patterns have held up throughout the years, or made a comeback in 2025. Here are some fun styles we saw:



Embellished corsets are a classy piece that is making an iconic comeback. When corsets emerged as a style in the 1500s, the somachers, or part in the middle covering part of the corset, was decorated in a number of ways. Corsets quickly became worn by women of all classes and social circles. By the 20th century, corsets had taken a more minimalistic approach, likely thanks to World War I. Since then, corsets have become less of an everyday item that become less and less popular with each generation, until today, when its resurgence in formal and less formal looks began. Now, many prom looks feature a corset top, likely due to the fact it can be very flattering. This year, many people have opted not just for a corset top, but one elevated with glitter, beads, laces, and more, which embodies the early days of the garment.



Yet another classic turned popular once more is the use of lace as an overlay. Originating in Europe in the 16th century, lace began as a gender neutral fabric before shifting to being more closely associated with feminine styles. Lace's highly detailed and meticulous nature made it a top choice for wealthy families of the time. Thanks to its use by noble and royal families, lace has garnered a reputation of delicacy, prestige, and luxury. Lace has since had a resurgence thanks to many designs being made in factories, thus it's able to be purchased by many more people. Still, dresses are being made with lace overlays and continue to convey elegance and sophistication, making it a desirable material for many people's prom attire.





Throughout history, fashion has been used as a statement, the colorful suit a prime example of defying societal expectations of one's presentation. The modern lounge suit we see at prom today originated in the late 19th century, and served as informal wear for sports and casual activities. Colorful formal wear can be traced back to the 17th-century royal court dress, which often consisted of over-the-top outfits with bright colors as a display of power. In the early 20th century, America established dull, simplistic suits as formal.

However, the pop culture fashion movements of the late 20th century fought back against this standard, reintroducing colorful suits in green, red, and various prints as a statement of empowerment. Today, the prom scene is seeing a return of colorful suits, undershirts, and ties as a way for wearers to match with their prom dates, or just stand out against the crowd of black and white.



No matter the piece of clothing, a fun way to add flair to your look is through beaded designs and patterns. Beading on dresses adds interest both in its visual design and its interesting texture. Beading, a practice that dates as far back as 99,900 BC, has existed on every continent from Africa to Asia, and has been a staple in style for over 100,000 years now. Beads have always come in a vast variety of colors, combined with the ability to create several different patterns or designs. This has made it a key material for decorating clothing across time and the world, including today, with many prom dresses. Whether some simple trim or a hand-made piece, beading remains popular thanks to its ability to bring a unique aspect to what might have been just a regular garment, which is perfect for an absolutely exceptional prom look.

Twinning at prom is all about showing connection through style. Dates and friends often match with corsages and boutonnieres in the same shade, ties or pocket squares that match dresses, or even bold, colorful suits. Some go all-out with coordinated outfits, while others keep it subtle with matching jewelry, shoes, or makeup. Whether it's a romantic statement or a celebration of friendship, twinning turns prom fashion into a fun and personal way to stand out together.





# The Choir in Bloom

*Acalanes hosts its annual spring concert*

Sophie Chinn, Jake Colaco, and James Hanzel | Staff Writers

Photo by Zinnia Khan



Eager whispers fill the Performing Arts Center (PAC) as the lights dim and choir members take the stage. The audience listens to a setlist of songs showcasing the Acalanes choir's musical growth.

The Acalanes choir performed their annual Spring Choral Concert in the PAC on May 16 from 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., which showcased their work throughout the year. In the weeks leading up to the performance, choir students rehearsed daily, refining harmonies, adjusting choreography, and finalizing entrances and exits.

"A typical rehearsal day would be running through all of our music as a group, going over where we will be standing during the concert, the order in which we enter and exit, recording our songs and submitting them to be graded, and splitting into sections to learn our specific vocal parts," choir member and senior Bee Reinsberg said.

The preparation process for the concert began at the start of 2025. The choral concert took inspiration from concerts performed earlier this year.

"We've been preparing music all semester. We are borrowing some music from our Chapel Concert at St. Mary's that happened in March and adding some new songs," director Meredith Hawkins said.

For some of the performers, the concert was not only a place to showcase their vocal abilities but also a place to connect with their peers.

"My favorite part of being in choir is the community. All the people are supportive of each other, and it's a good break from the stress of classes," choir member and sophomore Maya Bhatia said.

Many students have found that the benefits of singing together go past the stage, as they see the benefits of being

part of choir across all aspects of their lives.

"The choir has improved organization-wise; it helps us to be well-prepared for the concerts. Being in choir also helps my organization, my ability to work in groups, and my ability to learn in various subjects," Reinsberg said.

Some students faced challenges along the way, particularly with more complex pieces, as certain songs combined both singing and movements to create a difficult number.

"One of the more challenging songs of the year has been 'What Happens When A Woman Takes Power.' There's a lot of overlapping vocal parts, and we also do a pattern of coordinated stomps and claps while singing," Reinsberg said.

The students perform a few times throughout the year, and set lists vary for each concert. The earlier concerts often have a more streamlined theme, while the spring concert is more abstract.

"For shows like Pops or the Winter Concert, there's a pretty set theme that we work with. Chapel and the Spring Concert are a little more open-ended. I try to have a good mix of music in there, and I also think it's important to keep in mind what is happening in the world or the students' lives," Hawkins said. "For instance, at the Spring Concert, we are singing a song in Latin that translates to 'I will either find a way, or make one,' which is very appropriate for our graduating seniors."

Many considered the choral year successful, enjoying the experience and growth together to create a masterpiece.

"The great thing about these students is that they're very self-motivated and incredibly supportive of each other. I rarely have to convince them why they need to stay focused or get to work. They want to do well, and they understand that rehearsal is important ... and when someone is struggling, they rally around them," Hawkins said.

As the final concert of the year ended, some students reflected on their joy in participating in the choir.

"My favorite part of being in concerts is finally seeing the music come together onstage. My favorite part of choir in general is connecting with everyone, it's super cool to find other people who love music just as much as you do," Reinsberg said.



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## RECIPE OF THE ISSUE

### *Lemon Poppy Seed Muffins*

Gwyneth Lee, Mika Katznelson, and Natalie Pecci | Print Feature Editor and Online Editors

Photo by Mika Katznelson



**B**right and speckled with crunchy poppy seeds, these lemon poppy seed muffins are the perfect balance of sweet and tangy. Moist and fluffy with citrus in every bite, they make a delicious breakfast treat or midday snack.

#### **Ingredients:**

##### Muffins:

2 ½ cups flour  
1 ½ tsp baking powder  
½ tsp baking soda  
½ tsp salt  
¾ cup granulated sugar  
½ cup unsalted butter, melted and cooled  
½ cup milk  
½ cup sour cream  
2 large eggs  
2 tbsp freshly grated lemon zest  
5 tbsp fresh lemon juice  
4 tsp poppy seeds  
A splash of lemon extract (optional)

##### Glaze:

1 cup confectioners' sugar  
3 tbsp fresh lemon juice  
1 tbsp freshly grated lemon zest

#### **Directions:**

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Either grease or line your muffin tins.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together the dry ingredients: flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt.
3. In a large bowl, combine the sugar, melted butter, sour cream, eggs, lemon juice and zest, and poppy seeds.
4. Fold the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients using a rubber spatula until combined. Be careful not to overmix.
5. Fill the prepared muffin tins 2/3 of the way.
6. Bake until puffy and golden at the top, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. This should take around 20 minutes.
7. Once done, let the muffins cool for about 5 minutes in the tin before

transferring them to a wire rack to cool completely.

8. While waiting for them to cool, make the glaze. Combine the confectioners' sugar, lemon juice, and zest.

9. Once combined, you may add more lemon juice or sugar to adjust the thickness and taste of the glaze.

10. Once the muffins are at room temperature, glaze them. You can dip the muffins into the glaze, spoon glaze onto the muffins, or drizzle it over the top.

11. Let them stand at room temperature to let the glaze set.



## OPINION



### The Hidden Cost of High Achievement

*Redefining success to prioritize wellbeing and purpose for our students*

Haley Chelemedos | Staff Writer

Graphic by Hank Bauer

At some point in my childhood, I began to hear a quiet message that grew louder each year. It appeared in small, seemingly harmless ways, urging me to solve my times tables faster than my classmates and aim for the advanced math class. By the time I reached high school, the message was everywhere. It taught me that success meant academic rigor, high achievement, impressive extracurriculars, and the constant pressure to make every decision count toward a polished, stable, and prestigious future.

Working hard and challenging yourself are valuable principles. However, the way we pursue these goals in the Lafayette community is often relentless and competitive, creating a deeply rooted pressure that hurts the student experience.

At Acalanes and other Lafayette schools,

opportunities surround our students. Ranging from Advanced Placement classes to SAT preparation programs to college advising, students truly have all the resources they need. Along with feeling supported, however, many students feel that they are falling behind. Personally, no matter how full my day was, I felt that I should be doing more. It was not just internal pressure; it was cultural. We reward overextension, we admire stress, and we normalize burnout.

This pressure is reflected in Acalanes' growing attendance problem. In many of my classes, at least five students are absent on a regular basis. In a couple of my classes, almost half the class has been absent. While "senioritis" is nothing new, what we are seeing this year goes beyond that. Students struggle to make

it through a full week without missing school, not out of laziness but because we have been overextended for years. I have always been someone known for working hard, but even I feel so burnt out that it is not just school I want to avoid, rather learning itself.

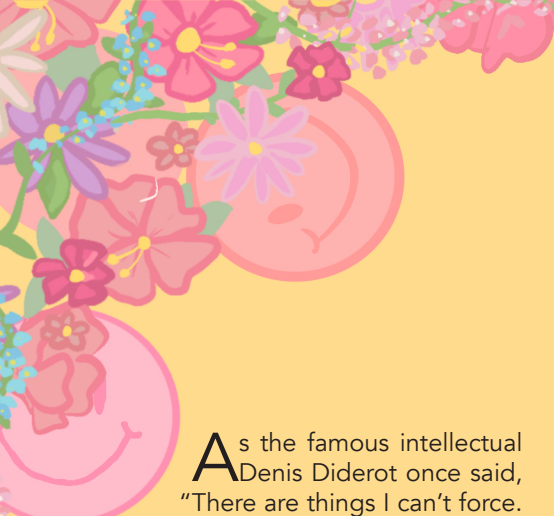
I know I am not alone in feeling this way. Ever since college decisions came out, it has been difficult to find motivation to keep learning. Now that I have been accepted into college, I find myself wondering why I show up to school and learn. I reached the goal I was working toward for years, so what comes next? Individual student attitudes reveal a deeper issue in our culture. We treat hard work in high school as a means to an end, admission to a prestigious university, rather than valuing learning for its own sake. As I prepare to leave Acalanes, I realize I need to unlearn this mindset and rediscover a true passion for education.

What I have come to understand is that success is not just about outcomes. It can not be measured in grades, test scores, or college acceptances alone. Real success includes well-being, honesty, and self-awareness. It means building meaningful relationships, making deep memories, staying close with my family, and learning more about myself and what I am passionate about. I believe everyone can find success in these things: in connection, in growth, and in discovering who they are beyond their achievements.

Redefining success on a personal level is not easy when the community around us measures it differently. That is why parents and educators play such an important role. High standards are not necessarily the problem; rather, the way that they are framed and reinforced. When achievements become a condition for love, pride, or attention, students begin to believe that who they are only matters if they are performing. I have felt this pressure personally and seen it in the people around me. Students who appear put-together are silently exhausted. We were taught how to build resumes, but not how to balance. We are praised for our achievements, but rarely asked how we are doing. When someone starts to slip, the instinct is to push harder or punish, not to pause and ask what is really going on.

*Continued on 37*





# “Sad” is Not in the Definition of Nostalgia

*How a change in mindset can change a life*

Grace Gallacher | Staff Writer

Spread by Sela Sarbiewski

As the famous intellectual Denis Diderot once said, “There are things I can’t force.

I must adjust. There are times when the greatest change needed is a change of my viewpoint.”

We could all take a page from his book.

With significant, life-altering events like graduation and college in the near future for nearly all of my peers, nostalgia almost always accompanies our final moments and memories in high school. Feelings of nostalgia tend to generate sadness and longing for past times. These feelings can be healthy, but they can simultaneously prevent us from growing by trapping us in a loop of searching for what is lost to the past. At the same time, Oxford Languages defines nostalgia as “a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations.” Even though nostalgia tends to weigh down on memories, “sad” is not in the definition of nostalgia – “happy” is.

While it is normal and good to be sad about past memories, we should recognize why we are sad in order to grow and become happier. In doing so, we can change our mindsets, preventing a never-ending cycle of looking for lost things and ultimately enabling us to advance and enjoy the new eras of our lives.

A change in our mentality can begin with becoming more optimistic. According to the Department of Homeland Security, “optimism is linked to better physical and mental health outcomes. It can also promote a sense of well-being during difficult times,” which therefore helps us better manage stress, relate to peers, increase our hope in life, and overall make healthier choices.

Our generation is in need of a mental reset, as according to social publishing platform Medium, Generation Z is one of the most pessimistic generations in history, despite all the world’s advance-

ments in healthcare, civil liberties, and education, which create the best quality of life the world has seen. Yet, if we continue to let pessimism weigh us down, we could get trapped in focusing on what we do not have instead of what we could accomplish. There will never be a perfect utopia; there will always be difficulties, adversities, and challenges that have never existed before. However, unlike previous years, we may not be able to solve these new problems due to the surge of negativity and pessimism in the current generation. That is, unless we encourage optimism - to look and hope for what is possible, rather than what we lack.

The same optimism applies to nostalgia. Appreciate how far you have come, but do not forget what else there is to achieve and reach for.

According to Thought Catalog, if we consistently view change as a negative, this perspective can prevent us from having positive future experiences. This can potentially contribute to mental disorders, toxic relationships, and a dangerous positive feedback loop of feelings of wasting time. In other words, negativity can prevent us from living in the moment, leading to missed opportunities and even missed periods of our lives.

Many of us feel fear surrounding events like graduations. We fear letting go of past experiences, that we will never find ourselves in that moment again. However, this fear can rob us of our joy in the moment and sour our pasts. Be brave, and let the past be the past. We cannot find replacements for our high school friends. We can, however, keep in touch and find new friends who also make us happy and laugh, keeping the old memories joyful. Further, we can embrace the “happy” by appreciating what we have while we have it. According to Harvard Health, “gratitude helps people refocus on what they have instead of what they lack. And, although it may feel contrived at first, this mental state grows stronger

with use and practice.” We can cultivate gratitude on a regular basis by writing a thank-you note, thanking someone mentally, keeping a gratitude journal, counting our blessings, praying, meditating, and so much more.

Even though it may seem like a weird or short task, according to Harvard Health, gratitude can reduce stress and depression, as well as improve overall well-being. Gratitude works because, by focusing on the good, we train our brains to notice what is present and valuable to us, promoting optimism and enabling us to live brighter and more satisfactory lives.

One of the most commonly difficult parts of learning to be optimistic can be breaking old habits by learning to put ourselves first. Learning to be selfish is important in order to maintain well-being and set healthy boundaries, which enables self-care and personal growth. According to *Psychology Today*, to start prioritizing ourselves, we should ask ourselves if certain negative thoughts and feelings were to guide our behavior, they would help achieve our ultimate goals; if those feelings do not work towards goals, they are “therefore considered unworkable,” meaning we should not let them interfere with our actions. While it is not an easy process, just like how we learned to behave how we do now, we can unlearn these habits.

Altering a mindset can take time and feel pointless, but oftentimes, the only thing we can change is ourselves. Let nostalgia be happy. Rather than sadness because it is over, let it be gratitude and pride that it happened, because not everyone got it. Let the definition of nostalgia reign true - reminiscing on happy memories - do not let the fact that it is over taint the past.

# From Mispronounced to Misunderstood

*Ethnic names deserve respect, not erasure*

Aamena Shipchandler | Print Managing Editor

Graphic by Bo Chevleau



As a kid, roll call on the first day of school was the most dreaded time of the day for me. As my teacher made their way down the list to the letter “S” for Shipchandler, a list of my classmates’ first and last names rolled smoothly off their tongue. Yet, once we reached “Shipchandler,” I heard the apprehensive pause of my teacher’s voice. I would sit anxiously as they struggled to figure out the correct pronunciation, find a way to shorten it to make it easier for them to say, or create an entirely new nickname for me. To my classmates, this part of the day was a routine part of the school year—learning one’s name. To me, this part of the day served as a reminder of how I was different.

Ethnic names refer to any name that holds significance to one’s heritage and identity. For the purpose of this article and my experience with my name, I will be using ethnic names to refer to names that do not phonetically reflect Mainstream U.S. English (MUSE). Ethnic names are often shortened, mispronounced, or changed entirely to fit the conventions of the English language despite their significance to one’s identity and culture. Preserving and respecting the traditional pronunciation of names in school, media, and professional spaces is not just a matter of courtesy but an act of honoring heritage, fostering belonging, and affirming the value of different identities.

The anglicization of traditional names stems from American immigration patterns and assimilation policies. During

the late 1800s and early 1900s, as immigrants arrived from Asia, the Middle East, and Southern and Eastern Europe, many were pressured implicitly and explicitly to change their names to blend into American society. The nation-wide Americanization movement, arising during this time, aimed to assimilate immigrants into American society. One of the ways this group forced assimilation was through pressuring to anglicize their names. Additionally, some immigrants changed their names in hopes of avoiding discrimination and increasing job prospects. One common example from Southern Europe was altering the name “Giovanni” to “John.”

This pattern continued throughout the 1900s, specifically during World War I and II when having a non-Anglican name could result in increased suspicion or hostility, in particular for Japanese-Americans and German-Americans.

Yet, the anglicization of ethnic names is not just a historical problem; rather, it’s one that thousands of people in the US deal with today. According to a 2004 *American Economic Review* study, job applicants with “ethnic sounding” names received 50 percent fewer callbacks than those with Anglican names. A 2020 survey by LinkedIn reported that 41 percent of those surveyed from non-Anglican backgrounds felt pressured to modify their names to make them easier to pronounce in professional spaces.

I observed this forced assimilation of names after first moving back to the U.S. from a Muslim country, where the

name “Aamena” is more common. As a young child, “Aamena” was normal to me: I knew others with the same name at school in Dubai, I had other friends with Muslim or Middle Eastern names, and no one seemed to stumble when they read it aloud. In America, this was not the case.

Once I reached the third grade, I decided I hated my name. “Aamena” was too clunky, too confusing, too many vowels, and too hard to pronounce. People never said it right anyway, so what did it matter? That year, I told everyone to call me “Amy” instead. I knew of other Amys; it was clear, simple, and people in America understood it.

For almost six months, I went along with my new name. When I went to school, my teachers called me Amy; my friends and their parents spoke to me and of me as Amy. Today, I cannot remember why I stopped. But within months, I decided to switch back and embrace “Aamena,” and the people in my life shifted accordingly. However, looking back on that short but impactful time, I am profoundly grateful that I chose to welcome the name “Aamena” back into my life and my culture and identity with it.

“Aamena” is an Arabic name that means “beautiful.” “Aamena” was the mother of the Prophet Muhammad, making the name central to my religion, a core aspect of who I am. My name connects me to my relatives, my ethnicity, my religion, and my religion’s language; to me, using my name means honoring my heritage. It rolls clearly off my tongue, and, as the Texas Speech-Language and Hearing Association says, “The exchange of names allows people to explore each other’s culture.” People who say my name properly appreciate my culture, ethnicity, and religion.

Saying someone’s name properly is not just an act of kindness; rather, it’s a recognition of identity, lineage, and the cultural history of a person. In a country that is recognized as a mosaic, with immigration from countries all over the world being a core aspect of our history, respecting names is the least we can do to reflect the diversity we say we celebrate. Names are not meant to be trimmed down or translated for personal convenience; they are meant to be spoken with care. My name is Aamena, and it does not need to be simplified to be respected.



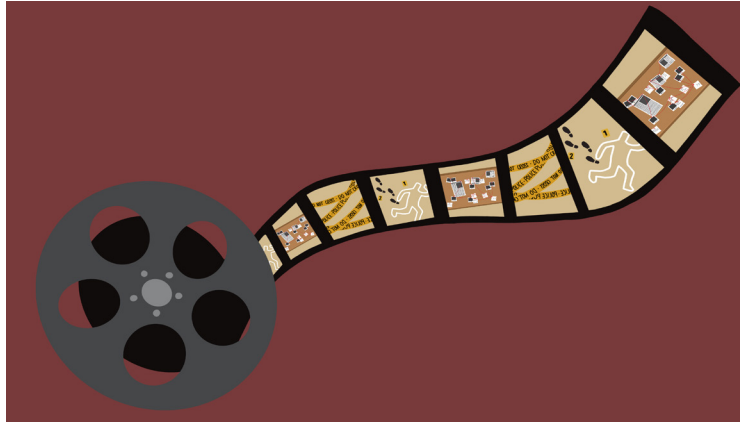
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## Crime and Media

Exploring the effects of sensationalizing crime for media consumption

Audrey Parkin | Online Editor-In-Chief

Graphic by Audrey Martin



As I was watching a true crime documentary explain in detail how someone was killed, I began to wonder what the true motivation of the filmmakers was. The film seemed to have no regard for the impact of the criminals' actions on their victims, but rather focused on the killer's motivation and thoughts. This caused me to question whether commercializing disturbing crimes and criminals was an ethical form of media.

True crime content is increasing in popularity, and, according to Edison Research, 84 percent of the U.S. population currently consumes true crime media. Many find heightened interest and engagement in the true crime genre over other genres due to its psychological appeal. According to an article from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, true crime not only offers entertainment and escapism like other genres, but also sensationalizes dramatic and real-life situations. The adrenaline, as well as interest in justice and drama that these

shows produce, captivates audiences.

With the rise in popularity of true crime comes debates on its role in society. Generally, sensationalizing crimes and criminals for media consumption has a negative impact on society. True crime should be about recognizing the victims rather than attention for the criminals and crimes, so that the industry focuses on justice rather than entertainment.

For example, Netflix has an extensive section dedicated to true crime, including various movies, documentaries, and shows. It includes shows like *Dahmer* and *The Menendez Brothers* which explore the personal lives and inner workings of notorious criminals in gross detail.

Much true crime content casts aside victims' experiences by portraying perpetrators as mysterious and misunderstood rather than shining a light on the harsh truth of the effects of their actions on others.

Famous conventionally attractive actors are often cast to play notorious serial kill-

ers, which encourages people to focus on the attractiveness of these characters instead of the ferocious crimes they are portrayed as committing. Romanticizing criminals can also cause the viewers to feel disconnected from the crimes and their effects on victims.

According to an interview in an article by *The Hollywood Reporter*, Netflix did not inform the family and friends of victims of serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer before making *Dahmer* due to his crimes being on public record. This means that Netflix cast actors and wrote scripts to recreate potentially triggering content, like court and torture scenes, without the consent of any family or friends of the victims.

To portray real, potentially grieving people in some of the most difficult moments of their lives without their knowledge can be dehumanizing, reducing them to characters for the entertainment of audiences. This showcases how the interests of streaming services can often be rooted in profit rather than the well-being of affected people when it comes to true crime content.

Additionally, true crime has a negative effect on its viewers. According to the American Psychological Association, consistently watching violent and disturbing content causes children to "become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others" and makes them "more likely to behave in aggressive or harmful ways toward others."

Despite the drawbacks, true crime is most likely here to stay, and the root of the problem lies in the way we view and support true crime content. Instead of looking at true crime content as a source of passive entertainment focused on romanticising the criminals and crimes, it is up to the viewers to instead focus the spotlight on the victims and those affected so that true crime can be a conduit for justice.

## School Expectations

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That instinct needs to change. Before we encourage students to keep working, we need to check in on their well-being and mental health. Before we reward per-

formance, we should recognize effort. Redefining success is not something students can do alone. Starting this cultural shift starts with conversation, listening, and building communities that value empathy as much as excellence.

The message I heard growing up, about speed, prestige, and achievement, was loud, but it was not the whole story. Suc-

cess should be personal, not performative. It should allow for mistakes, for failure, for slow progress, and for learning that does not show up on a transcript. It should reflect who you are, not what you have done. Every student deserves the chance to define success for themselves, and to know they will be supported, not just evaluated, along the way.

## SPORTS



### Springing onto the Field

*The annual Spring Flag Football Tournament reaches a triumphant end*

Emily Roberts, Tselmeg Orgilmunkh, Grace Gallacher | Print Head of Layout and Head Section Editor, Print Arts Editor, Staff Writer

Courtesy Photo by Ella Greenfield

Students fill the bleachers, cheering while their classmates sprint across the field to score a touchdown or pull a flag, all in hopes of winning the tournament.

Acalanes students signed up for the Spring Flag Football Tournament, which took place on April 27 with practices in the preceding weeks. The tournament consisted of six teams, led by student coaches, with a goal of facilitating school spirit.

The spring event allows participants who are busy during the fall to partake in competitive flag football. Without tryouts, students find that they can create memories without dedicating a significant amount of time to the sport. Some fall flag football players used their skill and experience from competing in the league season to contribute to their spring tournament team.

"I am happy that a lot of our [fall flag football players] were able to step up as leaders on the teams in [the tournament],

so that's good. I want everyone to have fun, and I don't want anyone to get hurt. So those are the goals for this, and if we can do that, then we can have a high-functioning, valuable event that we do in the spring," Ivankovich said.

Many players also notice the growth of connections with teammates in different grades and continue building friendships established during this event outside the tournament.

"It bridges the grades and brings everyone together. [For example], there are a couple of senior girls, and now I'm saying 'hi' to them in the halls because I know them through [practicing together]," participant and sophomore Santana Tamayo said.

The tournament is an Acalanes tradition, however, it has experienced changes to prevent injuries and make it more enjoyable.

"[Changes were made], including add-

ing referees, requiring mouthguards, adjusting flag football coaching, and re-branding," Acalanes Student Body (ASB) Secretary, spring flag football coach, and junior Bryce Birdsong said.

These changes came in response to issues that arose during last year's tournament, which prompted organizers to rethink their approach and introduce new measures. In addition to changes to the rules, Acalanes rebranded the program from Powder Puff to Spring Flag Football in response to student complaints that the previous name undervalued the female athletes.

"We simply thought that because all of our other sports-related events are named after that sport, why refer to the only girls-only one with a different name when 'flag football' already exists as a women's sport?" Birdsong said. "By changing the name, we separate our event from that history and instead focus on the present and future of our event, which intends to celebrate women's athletes in a fun, non-competitive atmosphere instead of placing focus elsewhere."

In this year's tournament, teams ranging from the Minions to the Bubblegum Bandits participated in a fun and competitive day of games to crown the winner. Many choose to participate to end the year with a social event.

"I've heard so many great things about the program, and it was one of my favorite events last year. I'm hoping for my team to win this year since we were so close to winning last year," participant and sophomore Stella Hamilton said.

This year, the Bubblegum Bandits team ended up victorious. The Bubblegum Bandits went into the tournament as underdogs with a team of all sophomores. Additionally, the team were not equipped with all of their players, but after recruiting athletes from other teams, the Bandits were able to pull off the win. Many on the team attribute their success to their connection and spirit.

"Originally we only had five people from our team show up, so we were gonna have to forfeit, but then two players from yellow volunteered to go with us so throughout the whole tournament," Greenfield said. "We cared more about having a fun energy and honestly having a good time, but we still wanted to win, so we were all psyched up."



# Bonds Beyond the Track

*Student athletes and volunteers participate in the Special Olympics*

Max Trexler and Avery Robb | Print Sports Editor and Staff Writer

Photos by Issac Topp



Carefully painted banners circle the track as the audience cheers and athletes get ready to represent their school at the 2025 Special Olympics. The twelfth annual Special Olympics were held at Acalanes on April 25. Essential Skills athletes from schools in the East Bay showcased their skills in various track and field events such as the softball throw, javelin toss, long jump, and different running and wheelchair races.

The Special Olympics was first held at Acalanes in 2013 after the Unified Sports program was established in 2007.

"The Special Olympics at Acalanes is a partnership between Contra Costa County, the [Northern California] Special Olympics, and Acalanes and is supported by our district," Activities Director Katherine Walton said. On Acalanes' end, the Leadership program is heavily involved in the planning process, ensuring that the event runs smoothly on the day of. "[We facilitate] communication between the county and Acalanes [to make] sure we have accurate registrations, facilities, and volunteers. We staff the event in order to make sure it runs as smoothly

as possible. My goal is that every athlete has their best day and families do as well," Walton said.

In  
essential Skills  
everyone excited for their events.

preparation for the Special Olympics, the Es-  
program spent two months practicing and getting

"The number one thing was to get the kids excited and hyped up for the event," Essential Skills Teacher Claire Hall said. "Leading up to the events, [we] showed them videos on how to do the events.

At the same time, Unified Sports was doing track so they were working on [their] events during track."

Although there were fewer schools this year due to budget cuts, many of the athletes still had a blast. With various events showcasing the students' athleticism, the limited number of schools can not overshadow the importance of these events

for all.

"We have student-athletes of every ability, coming together to celebrate just being physical and sharing activities. It's just, there's not a lot of time and place in the school year for these groups to all be together in one place," Adapted Physical Education Teacher Stephen Finch said.

For the athletes, the day is not just about competition, but also connection.

The event itself and the training Unified athletes pursue in preparation for the Special Olympics can cultivate friendships.

"Track is one of my favorite [events]," Special Olympics Athlete and senior Alyvia DeCredico said. "[I like hanging out with] my friends who do track at Acalanes."

For many, the impact of the Special Olympics goes beyond the finish line. The day leaves a lasting impression on the athletes and those in the stands cheering them on.

"The Special Olympics has a powerful impact on everyone involved. Toud to see their children celebrated and engaged in physical activity that fosters both fun and social interaction. For student volunteers, it's a meaningful experience that builds connection," Community Outreach member and sophomore Anna Motes said.



# Are We Sacrificing Long-Term Health for the Scoreboard?

*The importance of understanding the effects of concussions*

Audrey Tugade | Print Feature Editor

Spread by Bo Chevaleau

By the time I got my fifth concussion, I knew the feeling all too well: the throbbing headache, the foggy thoughts, blurred visions, and sudden exhaustion. What scared me was not the symptoms, but how normal they started to feel. When I got my first few concussions, I did not fully understand the risks. I told myself it was just something to shake off and push through. It was not until the symptoms of constant headaches, trouble focusing, and mood swings lingered for weeks that I realized how much damage I was ignoring.

Concussions are traumatic brain injuries caused by a jolt or impact to the head. Concussions cause brain dysfunction, and recovery can vary. Sometimes, concussion symptoms are not felt right away after the initial injury and can even appear days after impact. Therefore, it is best to take any head impact seriously, like a brain injury, even if symptoms are not felt.

Concussions in teen athletes cause long-term effects on developing brains, making them one of the most serious health risks in youth sports today. Educating teens about the severity and dangers of brain injuries is crucial, especially at a high school level. Raising awareness of the signs and seriousness of concussions can help ensure every athlete reports their concussions, gets the proper accommodations, and limits excess damage.

Teenagers experience more brain development during high school than at any other period in their lives. However, teenagers also have the highest number of reported concussions. A study published by the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reports that between 2016 and 2020, the number of eighth to 12th graders that had experienced at least one concussion in their lifetime increased from 19.5 percent to 24.6 percent.

Concussions are most common and dangerous at a high school level, where athletes often lack awareness of the impact of concussions during this period of brain development.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suffering a concussion during this critical level of brain growth can lead to long-term impacts affecting how a child thinks, feels, and acts.

Continuing to do sports, school, and activities prohibits cognitive rest and risks fatal injuries. According to the National Library of Medicine, Second Impact Syndrome (SIS) is a serious condition that occurs when someone receives a second concussion while still concussed. SIS can lead to death due to rapid brain swelling. Young athletes are at the highest risk for SIS, especially if they return to play too soon after a concussion.

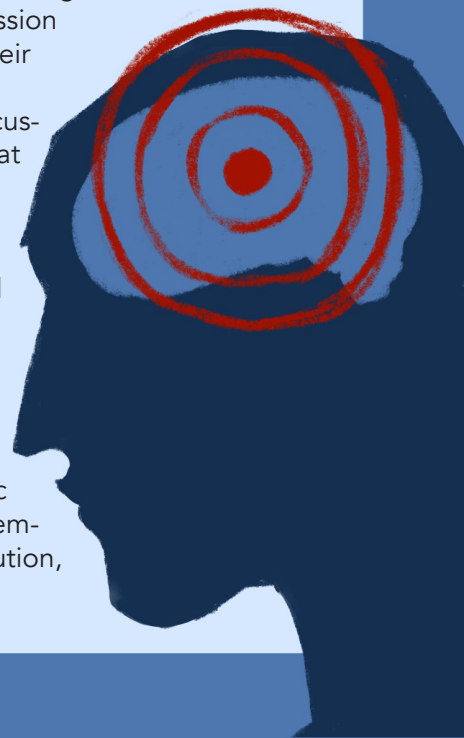
Coaches and athletes who ignore concussions and proceed with activity risk increasing the chances of long-term brain damage. Acalanes has a very detailed and strict concussion protocol, however, it still relies on athletes recognizing symptoms and reporting their injuries honestly.

The Cleveland Clinic states that rest is the most important part of treating a concussion, and taking breaks from intense physical exercise, especially from the sport that caused the concussion, is vital.

While the Acalanes athletics includes baseline concussion testing for some sports, there is still room to expand this practice and make it more consistent across all teams so that coaches and other athletic departments can recognize and help all athletes when they are injured.

In addition, Acalanes sophomores are required to take the Human Social Development course, which covers the development of the brain and concussions. Education like this is a necessity so that teens know the potential consequences of concussions and the importance of protecting their brains.

I continue to have random headaches and find myself having trouble doing basic tasks that I could previously do, like reading and focusing. My wish is that we can empower young athletes with knowledge and encourage a culture of honesty and caution, so we can protect not just their ability to play but their futures as well.





# Committed Athlete Profiles

*Students pursuing athletics in college*

Sydney Scovic, Samantha Swift, Haley Chelemedos | Print Feature Copy Editor,  
Print Arts Copy Editor, and Staff Writer

## Chase Bahou



Courtesy Photo/Chase Bahou

**N**ext year, senior basketball player Chase Bahou will continue his athletic career at Merritt College. His final success in achieving his collegiate basketball goal has come after years of hard work and dedication to the recruiting process.

"Playing in college was always the goal ... The recruiting process really picked up the summer before my senior year after I got noticed at a camp. That's when Merritt College reached out, and from there, it became real," Bahou said.

For Bahou, the road to college basketball has not been without setbacks, losing his junior year of varsity eligibility and facing a senior season that didn't go as planned. Still, he remained focused.

"I grew in ways I didn't expect. It made me mentally stronger. I kept working and trusted that what's meant for me wouldn't pass me by," Bahou said.

For student-athletes hoping to continue their sport in college, Bahou encourages them to keep pushing towards their goal even if it becomes hard at times.

"Work hard, and believe in yourself. Setbacks aren't the end. Stay patient and trust the process. The right opportunity will find you," Bahou said.

## Haley Chelemedos\*



Courtesy Photo/Haley Chelemedos

**H**aley Chelemedos is a senior committed to running track and field at Claremont McKenna University in the fall. She began running track in her freshman year of high school and decided she wanted to continue the sport at the collegiate level in her junior year.

The school was very appealing to Chelemedos for a multitude of reasons: academic, athletic, and beyond.

"Claremont McKenna was a standout school because of the amazing academics, tight-knit community, and great coaching staff ... I felt like I belonged at the school," Chelemedos said.

Being a competitive student-athlete, Chelemedos noted that it was often difficult to find schools that fit all of her requirements.

"A challenge that I faced was finding schools that met my academic standards, that were within my athletic abilities. Academics were my number one priority, but many top academic schools were out of my reach athletically. This really narrowed the scope of the schools I wanted to go to. I overcame this challenge by staying true to both my academic and athletic desires," Chelemedos said.

Chelemedos has also highlighted those who have supported her and given her guidance throughout her athletic journey.

"My dad has been the most supportive figure in my athletic career. He is always there cheering me on and celebrating my successes with me," Chelemedos said.

## Keegan Goddard



Courtesy Photo/Keegan Goddard

**K**eevan Goddard is a senior who is headed to play college baseball at Chapman University this upcoming school year. Goddard has been playing baseball since he was four and recently decided he wanted to play baseball at the collegiate level in February.

"The formal recruiting process started during my junior year ... There weren't many challenges for me during the process [other than] just being able to focus on the game when coaches are watching, and to just have fun and be yourself," Goddard said.

Goddard took many factors into consideration when choosing where he wanted to continue playing, and Chapman seemed to check many boxes.

"Chapman stood out to me for many reasons, but mainly because of the coaching staff. They have been super welcoming to me and always take the time to talk to me about baseball as well as issues outside of the sport. Also, being in [Southern California] is an awesome experience," Goddard said.

Goddard advises any potential athletes who are interested in pursuing a collegiate career to have trust in their training and enjoy themselves.

"Be yourself, have fun playing the game, and have confidence in your practice. Know that the work you put in will benefit you," Goddard said.

## Ariana Hallstrom



Courtesy Photo/Ariana Hallstrom

Ariana Hallstrom is a senior basketball player who committed to California State University, San Bernardino in the fall. Although she faced some obstacles in her recruiting process, she overcame them with persistence and patience.

"When you're getting recruited for basketball, especially at a high level, colleges typically look for the taller people first ... It's kind of a setback, mentality-wise, [and] I was getting down on myself. But I overcame it by focusing on myself and my own game, and not focusing on what other people around me are getting because I knew I was gonna get what I deserved in the end," Hallstrom said.

She chose San Bernardino because of the positive team culture, as well as the comfort that came with an early college commitment.

"I clicked really, really well with the team. That was the best place I could see myself at for the future. Also, I just absolutely loved the people on campus aside from my future teammates and the coaching staff," Hallstrom said. "Plus, it came with an early decision, which is something I wanted to do so that I would have a stress-free senior year for basketball. So that's mainly why I committed early," Hallstrom said.

## Bethel Imasuen



Courtesy Photo/Bethel Imasuen

Bethel Imasuen is a senior committed to playing Division I football at Boise State University. Imasuen started playing in the spring of his junior year. Prior to playing football, Imasuen played rugby, and many of the skills he learned in the sport translated to football. His recruitment process started in the summer before his senior year as he participated in camps at the University of California (UC), Davis and UC Berkeley.

"The most challenging part of recruiting was proving I had the ability to play at the next level. I had no game footage of me playing since it was my first year, and no experience to start with. I overcame that by watching as many games as I could, as well as practicing whenever I got the chance," Imasuen said.

As Imasuen became more interested in certain schools and football programs, Boise State made a notable impression in comparison to other schools.

"Boise State stood out to me because of the amazing culture I experienced during my visit, as well as my connections with the coaches. They also were really invested in the international players," Imasuen said.

After having committed to play at the collegiate level, Imasuen recognizes what helped him during his recruiting process and shares advice he would give to future athletes looking to play at a higher level.

"Always take care of your mind and body because the healthier you are, the more you'll be able to practice, recover, and play in games without getting injured. Take your classes as [seriously] as your sport, and send as much footage of your games to coaches as possible," Imasuen said.

## KK Lacanlale



Courtesy Photo/KK Lacanlale

KK Lacanlale is a senior who will be joining the Saint Martin's University women's basketball team in Washington

in the fall. She has been playing basketball since the end of elementary school and decided she wanted to play at the collegiate level at the end of eighth grade.

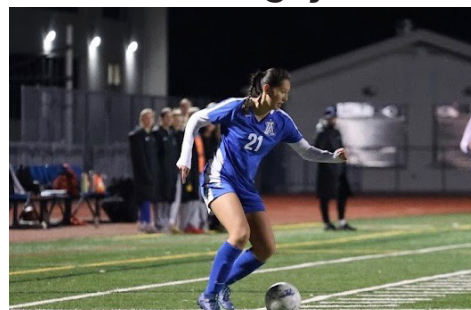
Saint Martin's University was able to fit her needs and accommodate her athletic and academic aspirations.

"The community is amazing, and it allows me to pursue a nursing career as well as continue my career in basketball," Lacanlale said.

Lacanlale notes all of the support and people who have helped her achieve her goals throughout the years.

"My parents and my siblings have always been a big part of my athletic career. Everyone has given so much for me to be where I am, and they never failed to sacrifice their time, money, or effort to make sure I am playing to the best of my ability while keeping God at the center," Lacanlale said.

## Nicole Nguyen



Courtesy Photo/Nicole Nguyen

Nicole Nguyen is a senior soccer player who committed to the University of Texas (UT) at Tyler. Along with playing soccer, Nguyen will be majoring in nursing, a key reason for choosing UT Tyler.

"One of the challenges that I faced throughout my recruiting process was staying confident. Not every coach will respond, and oftentimes the school won't be a good fit. This could be because academically the schools are not right for your major, or simply because you feel it's not a right fit for you. I overcame this by continuing to work hard, both on and off the field, and trusting that the right school would come along," Nguyen said.

Despite those challenges, Nguyen felt supported throughout her recruitment journey and stayed true to her academic and athletic goals.

"My family has been incredibly supportive throughout the whole process, specifically my dad. He has helped me



navigate the challenges of the recruiting process and provided unwavering support throughout my decision. He drove me to try my best in every practice, cheered me on at every game, and encouraged me to never give up during the tough times,” Nguyen said.

## James Stadt



Courtesy Photo/James Stadt

James Stadt is a senior committed for baseball at Chapman University in the fall. Stadt began playing baseball when he was five and continued competing until he began his recruiting process.

“I decided at the start of my sophomore year that [playing in college] was something I wanted to pursue,” Stadt said.

Stadt’s decision to commit to Chapman was influenced by both the benefits of the baseball program and the atmosphere of the school itself. He also liked the school’s location and campus.

“I had already been interested in the school and was drawn to Chapman’s baseball program because of their winning culture and coaching staff,” Stadt said.

With all of the dedication and work that Stadt has applied, he advises other athletes to make the most of their high school athletic careers.

“I’d tell kids that no matter what, have no regrets when your season is over. Whether or not you’re playing somewhere, you don’t want to look back and think ‘what if?’,” Stadt said.

## Sadie Suppiger



Courtesy Photo/Sadie Suppiger

Sadie Suppiger is a senior swimmer who committed to Vanderbilt University at the end of her junior year. Competing on both the Acalanes varsity swim team and a club team, Suppiger learned the importance of attitude and outlook as she navigated her high school athletic career.

“Being a part of an ‘individual sport’ makes it seem like you are by yourself, but I’ve learned that that’s not even close to the truth. The energy that is brought to practice spreads like wildfire, whether it’s good or bad. We all work together to make each other faster, and having a team grow together is the best feeling ever. I see these people more than my family on most days. They aren’t my teammates, they are my brothers and sisters,” Suppiger said.

Suppiger advocates for creating a healthy boundary between participation in a sport and the recruitment process and emphasizes following an individualized recruiting timeline.

“My advice would be to not get caught up in all this recruiting and remember why you even play the sport. Also, don’t compare yourself to others. It won’t help you; all you need to do is focus on yourself, and you will improve,” Suppiger said.

## Dulci Vail



Courtesy Photo/Dulci Vail

Dulci Vail is a senior basketball player who will be continuing her athletic career at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly SLO), in the fall. Her dedication and love for the game helped her find a school that feels like home.

“Cal Poly [SLO] was a standout school for me because the team culture was amazing, and I love the girls there. The coaches were a huge part of it. I just felt like they really did want me there. I wasn’t just a spot to be filled or a player that they had control over, I was like a person that they wanted to spend time

with, and that they wanted to join their family,” Vail said.

Although Vail made many sacrifices along the way, she encourages fellow student-athletes to stay persistent and patient in pursuing college athletics.

“It’s gonna take a lot of patience, but eventually you will find where you’re meant to be, whether you want [Division I], [Division II], or Junior College, if you love the game, then you’ll end up somewhere where you’re happy and you’ll end up somewhere where you will fit in,” Vail said.

## Demi Woods



Courtesy Photo/Demi Woods

Demi Woods is a senior soccer player who committed to the Colorado School of Mines to continue her athletic career. Competing with both high school and competitive club teams, the recruiting process for Woods began the summer before her sophomore year, starting on the first official day of the recruitment process for many schools. However, the formal communication with colleges could not begin until her junior year.

“Colorado School of Mines stood out to me because they were one of the first schools to reach out to me on the morning of June 15. It was clear that they were genuinely interested. I also made it clear early on that academics were my priority, so Mines being a top engineering school was a huge plus for me,” Woods said.

Woods offers advice to other students aspiring to play a sport in college, emphasizing the importance of resilience throughout the recruiting process.

“Don’t get discouraged if things don’t go as planned. There will be setbacks, but you have to stay strong and trust that it all works out in the end. Keep pushing forward, and remember that this process takes time,” Woods said.

*\*Blueprint would like to acknowledge that Haley Chelemedos is a member of Blueprint staff.*

## SPORTS BEATS

### Baseball

Owen Curley | Staff writer



Courtesy Photo/JP Birdwell

The baseball team (13-10-1 overall, 4-6 league) is looking to finish strong as they head into the home stretch of their season.

The Dons had a stellar start to the season, going 9-2-1 in their first 12 games. After the strong start, the team dropped seven of the next 13 games. The Dons picked up wins against Benicia 4-2 on April 10, Alhambra 1-0 on April 24, Clayton Valley Charter 3-2 on May 6 and a second 3-2 victory against the Ugly Eagles on May 9. As they enter the North Coast Section (NCS) playoffs, the team focuses on consistency and executing small details.

"For the next last couple of games we have to continue to stay true to ourselves and our style of baseball and continue to do the little things right," senior David Roux said.

As the playoffs have begun, the team is working to improve and build on their league performance. In a strong playoff bracket, the Dons look to upset upper seeded teams to fulfill their goals.

### Beach Volleyball

Donovan McGrath | Staff writer



Blueprint Photo/Donovan McGrath

With the spring season coming to a close, the women's beach volleyball team looks to end on a strong note.

The team started their season as they faced a tough team in Campolindo and fell short, losing the game by one set.

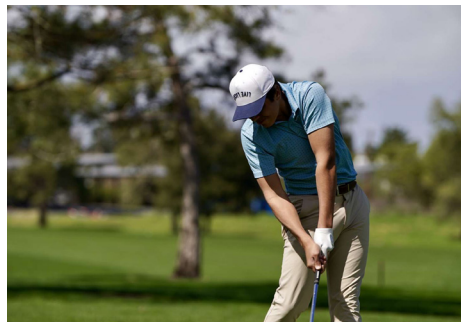
However, they quickly bounced back, defeating Clayton Valley twice and beating Las Lomas by once. Unfortunately, they lost their second match up against Las Lomas. Similarly, the team split their series with Northgate, winning one game and losing the other.

Despite the program's formation only two years ago, the team has progressed quickly, leading to an exciting future for the team.

"We're pretty good for [it being our] second year, so I'm excited to see how we progress even further," junior Valeria Toledo said.

### Men's Golf

Will Miller | Podcast Manager



Courtesy Photo/JP Birdwell

The men's golf team (6-1 overall, 4-0 league) has been up to par throughout their season.

On April 7th, the Dons took on Northgate at Contra Costa Country Club, where the Dons dominated the course with a 222-199 victory. On April 14, the team traveled to Moraga Country Club and came out on top again, defeating Campolindo by ten strokes, 194-184.

With the postseason approaching, the coaching staff is optimistic about the team's chances in the North Coast Section (NCS) playoffs.

"We should get into NCS with ease after the season we have had. On an individual side, we have multiple golfers with the ability to qualify for Norcal next month," Head Coach Steve Nelson said.

### Men's Lacrosse

Max Trexler | Print Sports Editor



Courtesy Photo/Fatiya Raza

The men's lacrosse team (13-3 overall, 5-1 league) maintains their strong form as the playoffs approach.

The team extended their early success, defeating California High School 7-3 on March 21, and followed it up with another win over Northgate 6-5 on March 25. Continuing their winning streak, the Dons beat Urban High School 16-2 on April 8, and handled San Marin 12-10 on April 15.

Building on their early-season success, the Dons hope to make a strong run in this year's North Coast Section (NCS) playoffs.

Looking ahead, the team knows that depth and resilience will be crucial in the playoffs.

"A successful NCS will be determined by our ability to stay healthy, and our young talents need to step up and fill the role of veteran players who are currently injured," Head Coach Nate Welcomer said.

### Men's Tennis

Tatum McElhattan | Head Section Editor



Blueprint Photo/Tatum McElhattan



The men's tennis team (11-8 overall, 2-4 in league) continues its strong run through the spring season. Commencing with a match against Benicia, the Dons were victorious, winning 8-1. The team continued their streak against College Park on March 25, winning 9-0.

The Dons battled against Bishop O'Dowd on April 7, losing 7-3, then competed against Las Lomas on April 9 with a strong win, 9-0. The Dons lost to Campolindo 8-1 on April 17 and played Miramonte, losing 8-1 on April 22. The Dons followed up with another game as they finished their season with a strong win against Northgate 8-1 on April 24.

As the team reflects on the season, they are proud of how they worked hard to achieve their goals despite the challenges they faced.

"This season was a season of change, I would say, because we have a lot of new players, a lot of new players as well who are from junior varsity (JV). So it's a season of change, but I would also say a season of growth, because we're kind of transitioning to a new team, getting new players on. We've had a new number one this year, as well as a transfer. So I would just say we're kind of building a new foundation," team captain Kaya Hoeberechts said.

## Men's Volleyball

Trevor Krick | Print Arts Section Editor



Courtesy Photo/Lily Briones

The men's volleyball team (6-14 overall, 2-8 league) ended their season with high hopes for next year. On April 15, the team celebrated senior night at home against Campolindo, where they lost 3-0. The team competed against Las Lomas on April 22, losing again 3-0.

Shortly after, the team travelled to College Park on April 25 and were defeated

3-0. Northgate stopped by Acalanes on April 29th, beating the Dons 3-0.

Turning things around, the Dons beat Clayton Valley Charter on April 30th, 3-1. The team then had a rematch against Campolindo, this time winning 3-0.

The coaching staff plans to utilize off-season activities to ensure the team is prepared for next year.

"Team chemistry is pivotal, and we are looking forward to regular summer and fall open gyms to keep the players on the court as often as possible. As our passers and setters gain another year of experience, our goal will be to continue to execute a more complicated offensive scheme," Head Coach Steve Long said.

## Softball

Jake Colaco | Staff Writer



Courtesy Photo/Cate Mercier

The softball team (9-11 overall, 1-9 league) looks to continue playing at a high level through league and into the playoffs.

The team is in a challenging league, which was apparent early on. On April 8, the Dons lost their first league game, 12-0, against Benicia at home. One week later, on April 15, they also fell short to College Park 12-2.

On April 17, they lost their third game in a row against Piedmont, with a score of 7-6. However, on April 22, they came back for a high-scoring 14-11 win against Northgate.

Despite the momentum, the team lost at home on April 24 10-2 against Alhambra. Less than a week later, on April 29, they lost with a score of 11-1 against Clayton Valley Charter. The team lost their third game in a row, 13-3, against College Park.

In order to bounce back from recent losses, the team looks to come together and build off one another's energy.

"We need to all work on being con-

sistent and having good energy all the time and making sure that we're playing as hard as we can," sophomore Gabby Huerta said.

The Dons faced Benicia on May 6, hoping to come back from their shut-out loss earlier in the season. The final score was 0-17 in favor of Benicia. Two days later, the team showed fight on the offensive side of the ball against Northgate, although they lost 5-14.

"[Our goal] is to keep playing hard and good things will happen, just like we had in the beginning of the year. We just need to get back to where we were," Silva said.

## Stunt Cheer

Avery Robb | Staff Writer



Courtesy Photo/Faith McLeod

The Dons stunt cheer team (0-7 overall, 0-7 league) finished their season facing new competition and creating stronger bonds.

On March 26, the Dons faced off against Campolindo but fell short 10-6. Two days later on March 28, they fought hard again against Clayton Valley High School but lost the battle 24-0.

In the weeks between their next game, the team nailed down their routines. On April 16, they suffered another loss 23-3 to Concord High School.

"The team's bond was incredibly strong this year. We supported each other through every high and low, and that sense of unity really carried us," Head Coach Faith McLeod said.

Although the stunt cheer team did not have the outcome they anticipated, they worked hard throughout the season and got better together.

"We really pushed ourselves to [be our] best. We had a new coach, and our team really worked on getting [the] technique down over more routines. I think overall it made us better than last year," team captain and senior Heloisa Mateus said.

## Swim

Emily Roberts | Print Head of Layout and Head Section Editor



Courtesy Photo/Bill Gerhardt

The swim Dons faced tough competition in the second half of their season before finishing strong at the Diablo Athletic League (DAL) championships.

On April 11, Acalanes fought hard against their rival Campolindo. However, Campolindo just surpassed the Dons, winning 20 out of 22 varsity events. The next week, on April 16th, Acalanes swam against Clayton Valley and El Cerrito in the annual Tri-meet, where the Dons secured second place with wins in six of the 22 events.

On May 3, Acalanes swimmers participated in DAL finals against 11 other local high schools. Notable performances included senior Sadie Suppinger placing second in the Varsity Girls' 100-Yard Freestyle and the Varsity Girls' 200-Yard Medley Relay coming in fourth.

At the North Coast Section (NCS) Championship meet, which took place from May 8 to May 10, five Acalanes swimmers qualified for the preliminary round along with three relays.

As the team headed into the last part of the season, Acalanes' swimmers came with the intent to finish strong.

"My goals are to finish strongly and end my swim career on a good note. As a team, I hope that we can keep pushing through and showing up to the pool, and for each other," senior Kate Roberts said.

## Track and Field

Noah Frankel | Online Editor



Courtesy Photo/Arielle Sears

As the Acalanes track and field team hurdles into the last part of the season, they are happy with their success and are determined to finish strong. The successful season is attributed to wins at meets and many broken records from the team's top athletes.

"I've hit massive personal records, and I am having a great season," sophomore Anju Sekhon said.

Their success results from many key factors, including great leadership and passion for the sport. The team's focus on working together and getting better each day has also been a key part of their success.

"Beat[ing] the other teams and doing things like warming up and stretching together and supporting each other at races [has helped our team succeed]," Sekhon said.

The team's Head Coach, Joe Escobar, is pleased with their year so far. Acalanes has shown up and done a great job against the competition. Numerous track competitors speak of the impactful team culture of the close-knit team.

"We have had a very successful year on the track with lots of all-time track records for varsity," Escobar said

## Women's Lacrosse

Hank Bauer | Staff Writer



Courtesy Photo/Ashlyn Fogarty

The women's lacrosse team (8-10 overall, 3-3 league) finished their season strong, despite elimination from the North Coast Section (NCS) playoffs.

The squad started the season off with a record of 3-7 in their first 10 competitions. However, since then, the Dons have proved themselves triumphant with a 12-11 overtime win over Campolindo on May 2. With this achievement, the Dons clinched a spot in the playoffs.

Following senior night, the team entered the NCS playoffs seeded 16th. Despite their best attempts, the team fell short, losing 19-7 against San Ramon Valley.

The coaches have high hopes for the future of the lacrosse program with promising underclassmen to support later NCS success.

Looking back, the Dons recognized that growth came from every challenge, victory, or defeat.

"It's definitely been a season with plenty of ups and downs. I think we had some successful games and games we've had to learn from," Zimmerman said.



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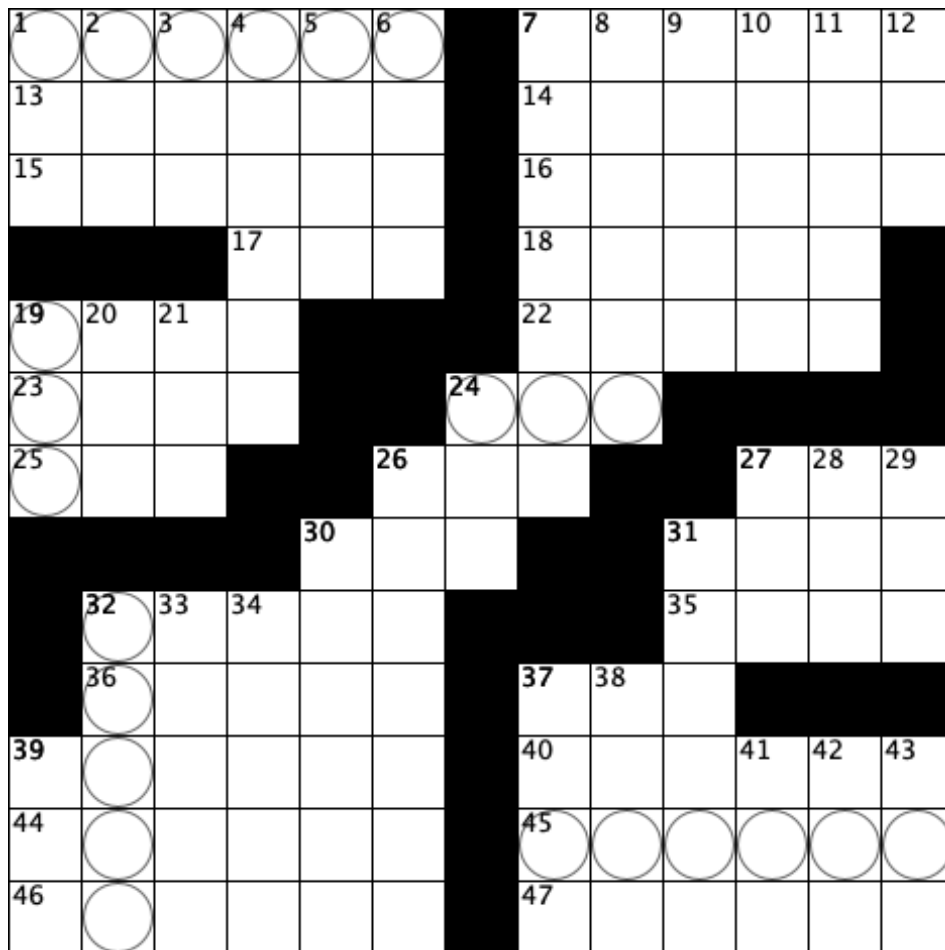


*Your Next Adventure*

# Crossword

Created by the Crossword Team

*School is out soon! Hidden in the crossword are words associated with summer!*



## Down:

1. Number of pins in a bowling lane
2. DNA's translator
3. Section of a play
4. What makes up a choir
5. Greek god of love
6. Part of a camera
7. Minsk is its capital
8. Rainforest spanning nine countries
9. Giulio \_\_\_\_, 1963 Nobel Peace prize winner in chemistry
10. "\_\_\_\_ On My Feet," famous Mac Miller song
11. To vote in
12. Dept. for state welfare programs
19. *Light brown shade*
21. A dog or cat
24. Day following Fri.
26. Company that makes the Twinkie
27. Single-\_\_ plastic
28. To mend clothing
29. Form of marketing
30. Second in command
31. An \_\_\_\_ hero, underappreciated person
32. *What surfers ride*
33. What lightbulbs represent in cartoons
34. \_\_\_\_ City, Oklahoma, named after a Native American tribe
37. Owls are often characterized as this
38. Water, in Colombia
39. Plural of is
41. Nonverbal language (abbr.)
42. To be born, in French
43. \_\_\_\_ Euromaster, popular tire company

## Across:

1. Visit another country
7. Prohibited
13. When the band comes back out
14. Electronic messages
15. Group with shared identity and territory
16. Traditional potato pancakes eaten at Hanukkah
17. Computer coding language used with HTML
18. Indigenous group that built Tenochtitlan
19. Scotch or duct
22. A method of cooking meat
23. Grows older
24. *Empire of the \_\_\_\_, popular band*
25. Knot homophone
26. Possesses
27. What a window cleaner does
- 30 Kendrick Lamar nickname: K-\_\_
31. Past tense of 27 Down
32. What a window cleaner does
35. First section of *Blueprint*
36. Take on
37. Past tense of is
39. Atlantic \_\_\_\_, "Monopoly" destination
40. Invasive species of lizard in Florida
44. Responds to a stimulus
45. *What one might watch at the beach*
46. Long-form writing
47. "Hotel California" band



Check Blueprint  
online for Cross-  
word answers!



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## ATHLETES OF THE ISSUE

### Ruby Robinson

Cameron Thornton | Head Section Editor



Courtesy Photo/Faith McLeod

As the stunt cheer team (0-7 overall, 0-7 league) rounds out its season, senior Ruby Robinson has been an integral part of the team's successes.

Robinson takes her role in senior leadership seriously, dedicating immense time and effort to the team and ensuring that others work hard.

"She's very hardworking, she puts a lot of hard work into the team and, especially as a senior, ... she puts so much of her time into [stunt cheer] and she makes sure that everyone else knows how important it is," sophomore Lexy Platto said.

Robinson's positive attitude and willingness to take on whatever the team needs her to do have been major assets this season.

"[Robinson] has contributed to our team's success by always bringing great energy into practice, [which] pushes us to be our absolute best. She's always switching around roles and is very flexible when it comes to filling in a spot that needs to be filled," sophomore Ruby Byrne said.

Although the stunt cheer team had some rough patches during the season, Robinson took on the responsibility of uplifting and encouraging the team through the ups and downs, allowing them to move forward and improve.

"I think there were certain times where everyone would be sad or be let down by our losses, but she definitely focused a lot more and was able to channel those losses as motivation for future things, instead of just being disappointed," Platto said.

### Luca Premo

Nico Roig | *Blueprint* Coordinator

As the men's lacrosse team (14-4 overall, 5-1 league) began their playoff journey, senior and captain Luca Premo's leadership qualities made him a valuable asset to the team.

Premo serves as a field manager on defense, keeping his teammates focused and on track.

"He makes sure everyone on the defensive side of the team knows exactly what they're doing... he isn't afraid to tell someone they're not doing what they need to do when they're out of line," senior Levi Mason said.

Premo's insights not only enhance his own performance but also uplift the skills of his fellow players. He has been a powerful source of leadership for everyone around him.

"He's almost like another coach that plays with us. He is a really strong leader and really keeps everything in check," Mason said.

Going into the first playoff game against De La Salle, Premo's on-field skills and leadership qualities were vital in helping the team compete at its best.

"Heading into our matchup against De La Salle, we will rely heavily on Luca's ability to communicate and direct the defense. Whether transitioning between man, zone, or other defensive schemes, Luca's command and coordination will be essential to our ability to compete," Head Coach Nate Welcomer said.



Courtesy Photo/Brian Houston

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